

FOURSCORE

SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

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~~Mary F. Smith 1910~~
~~hands off~~

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BY
SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL



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FOURSCORE

BOOK ONE
WESTWARD

FOURSCORE

CHAPTER I

I

WITTELSHOFEN, little village of peaked roofs and gables, all in a huddle behind tan walls; with gates of solid masonry, stolid cathedral tickled by restless poplars—Wittelshofen, in our time, is not to be discerned from the narrow-gauge railway, although you may see its ranked mulberry-trees and checker-board rye fields in twenty tones of green, and guess its pleasant seat in the plain. It is a cheerful leisurely place, abounding at once in sunlit warm corners and in deep doorways shaded even at noon to purple-black; the village is disturbed none at all by its one point of interest, the cathedral, a building of the tenth century glooming behind a façade of the seventeenth, all whitewash, cornucopias and sprawling Apostles: thus it seems now to the strayed traveler who, breaking his journey between larger towns, simmers for three hours in an omnibus along with flies, fleas, poultry tied at the legs, old women in black bonnets.

The cortège from Munich saw a vastly different town of it when it approached the gates in the spring

of 1843. The young leafage glinted like a veil of golden gauze, the poplar buds were dull pink and brown, the chestnuts had all their candles afire; larks and meadow-birds by the dozen were abroad in the clear sky. Below the old castle—a grizzled and blind block of masonry on a spur of sandstone—a good mile from Wittelshofen, stood a company of boys and girls, their arms full of flowers. Their shrill song welcomed the riders, and to the same hopeful music they advanced; soon this was joined, punctuated metrically, by a riot of bells from the cathedral. People massed at the gates, at the windows, on every roof whose angle permitted, a motley of orange and ultramarine, crimson and green. “*Hoch! Hoch!*” ran like a river of sound from the gates about the streets, until, in the central square, where the town officials waited in solemn estate, the volume of it had the throbbing roll of surf on a cliff. Thud upon thud came the cheers.

They made one catch breath and think great things; they made the eyes swim.

The commander of the regiment, snuffing drink, was in his glory; idol of a crowd he despised; proud he looked and very greatly a ruler, firm-lipped, with a high head, and a flush on his white cheeks. Along with his bullet-headed captains, he looked over the throng, and his eyes narrowed as he saw the robed priests and the dapper sons of them—here would be excuses, and excuses . . . *pfui!* was he a lawyer that he must argue with them? *Pfui!*

At the instant that the soldiers clumped guns to the cobbles he swung from his horse and bowed to the mayor.

"I am dry!" he said by way of preface, and said nothing more until he had wiped his blond mustache of foam.

"It is not so good as that of last year," he added, after he had drawn breath. "Bitter. Not so smooth. Well, that is the way of it! Now, Mayor, your lists!"

As the mayor handed them over silence fell in the square: the village of Wittelshofen knew every name on that list, knew every young man who must serve his two years; it had been discussed for days, weeks, yet now, at this second, it became something more than words. Now it happened. It was not so bad as war, no, but it was next to it. What would those boys learn in their two years in the army? What wouldn't they be taught! The officer counted aloud: "*Eins . . . zwei . . . drei . . . vier . . .*"

He counted to thirty-three. "It is not so bad," he announced loudly. "This has been a boy-village for a few years. That is excellent, in one way, but bad in another. There is the future we must consider. But just the same thirty-three from a village like Wittelshofen can not be complained of. Hmm. Thirty-three, I like to count by fives. It makes the reports easier to add. We must have two more men!"

There was a rustle on the church steps.

The officer glanced blandly at the group of priests, scraped his smooth-shaved chin a moment, and suddenly shot his finger toward a lad standing beside one of the churchmen.

"You, are you on the list?" he barked.

The boy glanced at the priest beside whom he stood, and the elder man answered for him. "He trains for

the church, General. He is very devout. He studies hard. Even now he has completed——”

“What is his name?”

“His name, General? Friedrich Hess. He has already learned——”

“Friedrich . . . that is a good name for a soldier. Well, little Friedrich, we make a soldier out of you, even if the material is not so good. We give you a pair of shoulders, so you can carry a gun. What—are you still talking, Father? I said he becomes a soldier. After that, make of him what you will. That is thirty-four. I need one more.” He looked about, and it pleased him to become jocose. “How about you, sister?” he said, patting the cheek of a girl who stood near. “Would you like to go with us? What is it the poet said? ‘*Gar schöne Spiele spiel ich mit Dir?*’ That was a good one!”

He waited for the ripple of laughter that was forthcoming only from the group of officers about him; the girl edged away, crimson-cheeked, and was lost in the throng.

“I want one more!” he roared, taken aback. “Have I all morning to spend here? Have I no other business? Must I be for ever kept waiting? Mayor, I need another man. A man, mark you. Something on two legs. That can walk. And eat. Eat! Such appetites as these country *Dummerlings* always have! Who else is there? Think fast, Mayor. I am tired of waiting.”

The mayor blinked at him.

“There is an *Einjähriger*—a one-year man—the only one we have ever had in Wittelshofen. But he goes next year. His examinations were—so the letter said

from the examiners—nearly perfection. We are very proud of him. But he goes next year for his service." A pause. "There is no one else, General."

The officer puffed out his cheeks. "Are my records to become troublesome simply because there is some one in this manure-heap who knows his '*der-die-das*' and how many feet there are in a turnip field? We must have this paragon. Is he another priest's son? We have enough cooks and orderlies already. Where is he? Give me a look at the boy who could learn anything in this cabbage-patch. He might make me a secretary, for"—a glare about him at his own men—"there is none of my regiment who can add two and three without making six."

The mayor combed his beard with uneasy fingers.

"I saw him when the list was read. But . . . I do not see him . . . now. No . . . I do not see him."

"Look closely, Mayor!"

One of the over-officers whispered to his commander: "When you said 'thirty-four' I saw a big fellow move away."

The commander grinned. "He is no fool, eh, Franz? He knew what was in my mind. Where does this fellow live, Mayor? Send for him. You"—to one of the officers—"go with the mayor, and bring the boy back. In the meantime, all whose names were on the list wait here in the square. The rest of you go home and eat. Hmm . . . Mayor, if I went to the inn, could I eat anything better than hard bread and sausage full of sage?"

"They will give you anything——"

"We will see about that. Come, Franz, you and I

will see what there is. *Sapperlot*, but I ache internally ! Have the regiment bivouac outside the walls, and tell them I will send beer out, if I think of it. Let us see if the mayor lies, for very little will satisfy me. And"—as an afterthought—"send this paragon to me at the inn ; I will talk to him there."

The day was bright, breezy and white-clouded. The poplars twinkled innumeraibly, the long Bavarian blue-and-white gonfalon on the *Rathaus* flacked and strained with the wind ; the villagers did not go home, but kept an open square in the market-place ; beyond, the regiment, its steel full of scintillations as opalescent as a conch first brought to air. The far south hills were bright with early verdure, on the nearer slopes brown cattle stood motionless, heads all pointed to the mild wind. For all the villagers, the two officers on the inn's one step could hear the chirping of sparrows on the housetops.

The commander unbuttoned his tunic and found a cigar.

"It is very lovely, this land of ours," he said, so unexpectedly that his companion started. He smiled queerly, and added somberly, "But what have we to do with loveliness, eh, Franz? Come—let us eat, my friend!"

His voice, with the last words, became harsh again ; nevertheless he passed his arm through his brother-officer's as they entered the inn. The two men sat on a narrow bench before a bare wooden table, their feet making twin tracks on the sanded floor as they stretched them at ease under the table. The commander's order was simple : that the food be hot and

that there be plenty, that it be served as rapidly as possible. He backed his argument with a gold coin. He lighted his cigar after that, and said nothing more. Once he glanced up at his companion; the other smiled at him, and said quietly:

"A letter from my Johanna this morning, Karl. A girl, it was. Two weeks ago."

The two men smiled at each other, and Karl Ebbing patted the speaker's hand.

They sat silently after that, and minutes later the host spread a red-and-white cloth before them, anchoring it with two pewter-topped porcelain mugs.

It was the day that the town counselors had their monthly dinner; it was this that the officers were served. A great brown goose, plump with last autumn's chestnuts, and with an apple roasted in the neck, sent up a delicious vapor before them, and, to give it relish, mashed and buttered yellow turnips, potatoes diced and fried in the rich fat, a translucent heap of apple-jelly flavored with elderberries and purple from them, pickles bursting from their own juice and yet crisp as the goose's crackling skin, a round crusty loaf of the day's baking. . . .

Ebbing rose from his bench and addressed the goose with the carver the inn-keeper had placed beside his plate. First he examined the blade for keenness, then poised it delicately over the plump breast, just to one side of the curved bone. As the knife touched the crisp skin his eyes left the bird before him, although the knife's edge did not waver, did not so much as touch, nor did it draw back. It, his hand, his arm, seemed turned petrified substance; his face, as well, became

graven into the lines of satisfaction with which it had surveyed the rich food and drink; his eyes, however, moved ceaselessly, from door to window, from window to door. The flicker of sunlight on a polished pewter dish made him blink once; with that movement his eyes became as fixed as the rest of his body, all straining, so it seemed, toward the open door which led from the street.

Ebbing could see on the slope beyond a low wall; could see a garden full of trees, myrtle, lilac, acacia, with a complement of thin firs and shining laurel to give a setting to so much golden-green and pastel. The firs moved in the breeze, the laurel hummed softly leaf against leaf, and already dropped tiny white flowers like an early snow . . . his eyes seemed fixed on this bit of peacefulness, but did not see it.

His companion whispered: "What, Karl?" but Ebbing threw him off by his very silence.

He had sensed something: a noise, perhaps, that stirred him: hard-running feet on the cobbles, he believed, nor was he mistaken. They came closer—clup-clup-clup.

The commander did not change his strange position as he heard a gasp from the throng in the market-place, did not change it as the hurrying feet neared the inn, did not move a muscle as the officer he had sent after the missing recruit ran into the inn, drew himself up and saluted.

Ebbing's very mildness was alarming: "Where is the fellow you were to bring?" he asked.

It was not the question he should have asked. It was apparent where the fellow was—some place else than

here, some place else than Wittelshofen: either headed for the church, with candles beside him, or for the shoulders of the far hills. For the officer's face was distorted, with the pace he had set, with rage, with the marks of a fist. Already an eye was puffing shut. From one nostril came a steady trickling of carmine, that was dammed a moment in his mustache, then to continue down the corner of his mouth, chinward, over his tunic, where it was lost as on blotting-paper. The salute had been promptly given, but with the left hand; the other hung, dangling, at his side.

"Where is the man?" Ebbing asked again.

"*Exzellenz*, he stood behind the door of his house. I entered. He hit me. Over the head. With something of iron!"

"And then?"

"I fell. He must have kicked me. The mayor helped me, bathing me with cold water. I awoke. And I came as fast as I could. Shall I give word to search for this criminal, this country swine, this kennel-cur? Shall I——"

"Did he kick you in the face, Blumenzog?"

The officer touched his battered countenance, and nodded.

"And in the eye?" very gently and disarmingly.

Another nod.

Ebbing sighed. His eyes dropped from Blumenzog's, and very carefully he let the knife sink to the goose, and began to slice it daintily. "A hundred years ago, I could have sliced your feet—like *this*—and *this*"—play with the knife steadily—"but now I can not. Blumenzog, I have it in my mind to say you lie.

An iron weapon? Kicks from a foot? It was a rare beating he gave you! Why? What happened? . . . There, I want no more lies! If I can not know the truth, I need know nothing." He began to pile slices of meat on one of the two dinner-plates. "You will be transferred, Blumenzog. It was a mistake to lie to me—with that face of yours!"

He grunted, and began to pile spoonfuls of dressing beside the thin slices of goose.

Blumenzog twiddled a forefinger against his thumb nervously. "It was that . . . the man is crazy," he blundered.

"Are you an alienist, *Leut'nant*?"

"After he . . . after I . . . after we . . ."

"After he had thrashed you, yes? Go ahead."

"There was a girl in the room, and he——"

"The girl?"

"No . . . the fellow. Johann Meissing. He said——"

"You are not very clear, Blumenzog," Ebbing interrupted suavely. Before he continued he reached for the bowl of turnips, saying to his companion, "You will have some, Franz?" Then: "Might one ask where you discovered this man's name?"

"I asked——"

"Thereby losing valuable minutes, Blumenzog. Had you but gone at once, he would have had no time . . . but . . . there . . . we must make the best of what we have, not what we want. Now: you started to speak of insanity, which is a poor appetizer for our goose. And please to be coherent. Slowly. You said

the man was crazy, and I asked how you determined that fact."

"I saw him . . . from the floor, where I was. He threw his arm about the girl——"

"Is that being crazy? Many of us . . . go on, *Leut'nant*."

"Meissing threw his arm about her," the heckled officer said doggedly. "I think they kissed. And then he pointed to me, where I lay. 'I would have gone!' he yelled. That was a lie, for, when I seized him by the collar he did not come! 'I would have gone!' he shouted a second time. 'Anything is better than the cows and the geese of Wittelshofen. The army, even! Much as I hate it!' When he said that, I tried to rise and——"

Ebbing lifted his mug, peering over the edge sardonically, started to speak, changed his mind, and set the liquid down untasted.

"'My people came here when this was only a tiny village,' the fellow said to the girl. 'But, before that, they were rovers, wanderers to new places. . . . I stifle here! I would have gone to the army. I but returned to the house for my bundle . . . and for a moment with you, Elsa. But now'—here he looked down at me again—'now I can go farther than the army would take me, for my parents can not hold me back, knowing that I would be jailed . . . for that'—here he pointed at me—'and so . . . soon I send for you, Elsa. . . .'"

"That was what he said. Something like that. I remembered. That was what he said. He was crazy. Why didn't he come? Why didn't——"

Blumenzog licked his lips, and the last word hissed itself out like the gander of the roast goose's flock. He waited a minute, saluted Ebbing's back, and, whirling on his heel, left the inn-room quickly.

"He lied," Ebbing said, his mouth full. "He lied, in all save what the boy said. That was truth." He lifted the mug, and set it down with a crash, untasted. "He stifles, Franz! He stifles! For that we let him go, eh?"

The other smiled at him. After a moment he said, "Karl, if it were not that the boy were an *Einjähriger*, and questions might be asked, you would have searched for him?"

Ebbing laughed. "Because I am soft, you make excuses for me. He said that he stifled! Well, he is gone." He drew a huge breath. "But you and I, Franz, we do not stifle . . . we dare not stifle——" he laughed again, harshly, adding, "He will be for the hills. Do you remember the hills, when you and I were fresh from school? Do you recall the time . . . *ach!* I talk too much."

For the third time he lifted his mug.

"Let us drink that this Meissing——" he began, then changed wryly to: "I have horrible mathematics before me, Franz. Thirty-four recruits from Wittels-hofen—it will involve all my rolls and additions. It will—what did you say?"

"I said that the beer gets no better for waiting, Karl."

"No . . . no better. The boy will make for the hills . . . where the laurel grows. . . .

"*Kellner!* The beer is flat!"

2

In the changing evening light the hills beyond Wittelshofen were full of warm color, in places mysterious and translucent as amber. In the plain shepherd boys in their bright short jackets led home their flocks, and along the birch-parading road a delicate vagueness was beginning to travel, like a wanderer setting forth to greet the coming of the night. The long mountains to westward were changing from moment to moment, becoming a little softer, a little more tender, putting off their distinct hues of the day for the colors of sleep and forgetting. The bright-leaved trees lost their wonder of shining, and the skies the rapture of their diffused light. A purple haze, imperceptible, dulled every outline, fog-like; above it the sky was clear, cool, but all it wrapped became dreamy, came to assume extraordinary shapes: a tree a misty church, a cottage some wraithy monster breathing smoke and waving tentacles, a bush—a bush a hiding man. A soldier, perhaps.

Johann Meissing had, since the regiment had come from the north, gone toward the north; not far, merely outside the village and to the second or third thicket. Here he had waited through the afternoon, waiting for night; now that the night had come he feared going on. Might he not step into the very arms of the soldiers he wished to escape? He was no coward, no, never that (he thought), but should he be foolhardy?

He had never spent such an idle afternoon before. In it, involuntarily, his mind wove a fabric of his future, yet the woof twisted and warped. This much

was clear to him: he was going to America. Had he not cousins there, and an uncle as well? Not cousins by marriage, but his own? Would they not take him as their own—as he was?

Of the sea he was unfearful. He did not think of it as raging: it was the essence of turbulent strength. It was changing, shifting, always new, always different. . . . He, he was a cow, eating, drinking, sleeping . . . well, he would be a cow no longer! His future lay over the gray sea. Anything else was an interlude. He would send for Elsa, some day; he wondered suddenly if she would be satisfied away from the tiny village and her friends; she liked her rows of shining pewter vessels, the odor of the high-hung hams. . . . He had been like those hams! Hanging to dry! A great gust of spirit moved him. He stood erect; he would wait no longer, but be on his way. The soldiers—pooh!—they would not see him——

He cowered down, watching the leaves of the thicket move with a sort of fascination. Something was approaching him steadily, keeping an undeviating course . . . making for his place of concealment. He hugged the ground, but it came to him that he would not go back.

Suddenly, instinctively, he knew that it was no man, no soldier, but a child, that all the leaves' movements proclaimed childishness. Presently Meissing saw a very small sturdy boy of ten, wearing a collarless shirt, leggings of some thin brown material, square boots, and a funny little patched brown coat hanging down with a fulness almost of skirts about the small determined legs. A dog trailed the boy: a blunt-nosed, round-

headed curly-coated type, whose whiteness was broken by two great black blotches set askew on the back, and by a black patch which ringed the right eye and completely smothered the cocked-up left ear. The child carried a stick, which reached to his shoulder; the dog, like his master, had no collar.

As the child saw the crouching man, Meissing touched his finger to his lips, and the urchin nodded sagely. The dog, however, uttered a short gruff bark, looked at the man, looked back at the boy, wagged a fat tail, barked again, abruptly depressed the fore part of its body until its chin was against the ground between its paws, then jumped into the air with a sudden demeanor of ludicrous waggishness, which made Meissing smile, even while he motioned for silence.

The boy smiled back, and touched his animal with the end of the stick. The dog refused to be still: he made a muffled, half-hearted attempt at a menacing snarl, gave over, came to make friends in a way devoid of all dignity, full of curves, wriggling, tail waggings, and grins which exposed every tooth.

Before the man could speak a word, the boy whispered, "You are Johann Meissing, from Wittelshofen. Already the word is as far as our farm. But the regiment has left Wittelshofen——"

"Which way has it gone?" breathlessly.

"Always south . . . the great general said—so my mother told me, and my sister's husband, who was in Wittelshofen, told her—the general said they would get you——"

"How, child? Has he sent men——"

"That they would get you when they had more time!

There was more that he said, something about smothering, but none of us understood it. It was a matter for high-born to know of."

"Then the soldiers are . . . gone?"

The boy grinned. "*Gewiss*. Gone entirely. And all of the beer with them! So I was told." He looked at Meissing timidly, and then said, "And you go . . . where?"

Meissing shook his head like a dog shaking water from its pelt. "I go . . . where? Young one—I go! Far!" Dramatically, from relief, he waved his hand. "Over the sea!"

"A good stick—so says my father—is a fine companion," the little fellow said sagely. "I . . . I suppose you would not take"—a glance at the dog—"us with you? Then . . . my stick. Take it." For a moment, hand in pocket, he hesitated, then went on rapidly, "I have saved this cake from my lunch. . . . I meant to eat it when I hungered before supper—here—you will be hungry—" and, as if that exhausted him, he dropped the hard cake on the ground, smiled and started hurriedly away.

The dog sniffed Meissing's legs again, then, barking joyfully, leaped after his master. Before the thicket hid him, the boy turned, smiled confidentially, winked as if he were the sharer of a secret, suddenly turned and bolted down the slope, followed by his curly dog.

Meissing watched until the thicket thinned and revealed him scampering down the hillside, then stood up, picked up the stick and brushed through the undergrowth northward. In the clear he stopped and looked

back at the crescent-shaped plain which held the dim figure of the child instead of feared soldiery, searching for him; he saw dark specks, that would be cattle grazing late. The river was marked out by reeds and sedges. In this moment, unconsciously, the hills, the river, the cattle, were telling memory to lay in its provision for the future; these hills, this country, would never come back as they were, never might he hear the dry music of the alder-leaves: he was saddened, and turned to walk forward with his head low.

3

Once he met some gypsies—rascally wanderers, lean as greyhounds, chicken-stealers and robbers in the night, yet with a sort of consecration of careless cheerfulness about them. They called out. In their cries there was the sound of a lively malice. Their brown feet stirred up the white dust and set it dancing in the sunshine, a symbol surely of their wayward, unfettered spirits. A little way off, on a slope among the trees, their dark tents were partly hidden.

Meissing wondered if they were happy.

Free they were, but happy?

He, himself, was unable to know if he were happy or not. He was away: every day brought new scenes, new people, and each day he enjoyed them more. At first he had been given to much thinking: of the cottage Elsa and he would have lived in, of the two cows, of a warm fireside—but now he thought of that little. *Ach*, but that was where his ancestors had a finger in the baking! This was what he was made for; each

afternoon the beer tasted more delicious, each night the inn-keepers treated him with a greater deference, as if the thing were measured by miles traveled, and places seen!

The inns, with a straggle of vine over them, with the tables set before them, or in the shadow of a tree; the great evening dish of lentils and smoking sausage, the beer; the talk afterward . . . it was as fine as the day itself.

Peasants would pass him on pattering donkeys, all with a word of greeting. Carts occasionally caught up to him, and in them he rode a space, possibly from village to village, possibly munching a black radish as he talked to the driver; geese clattered at him as he walked, dogs barked in front of thatched cottages; by thin runlets of water were women, chattering as they washed the clothes of their households: it was good to chaff with them, to laugh, to feel one's manhood, to know that they would say, "There goes a sturdy *Kerl*!" when one passed! He came into the land of vineyards, on the terraced hills. At the evening meal there was wine instead of beer; it was good to drink last autumn's golden glory in the spring, good to have one's opinion deferred to, good . . . good to know that to-morrow he would go on, farther!

Meissing grew brown. The hollows in his neck disappeared, were replaced by stringy muscular development; his eyes grew clear and bright. There was a tenseness in his very striding, as if his legs could not carry him seaward fast enough, as if hidden energy of his body rushed him ahead; his good spirits were un-failing and infectious now. He could tramp for hours

without losing his freshness and zest. Every little episode of the wayside interested and entertained him. He showed an ardor almost like an intelligent child's in getting to understand all he saw. Scenery, buildings, people, every offering of the cities he passed was eagerly accepted, examined, discussed.

He had been a good student, and compared many places with the ways he had imagined they had looked; terror and death had been abroad in this land once . . . *ach!* such things no longer happened. A queen had killed herself in that very church, a king had fled into that high castle, and been burned out of it, cursing, upon a sword-point . . . now all one did in the army was to parade, and drink beer, and chuck the girls under the chin!

Many things stopped him: a fly with shining wings journeying among bright leaves, a beetle creeping over the sandy road leaving a minute pattern behind it; the insect with its wings that caught the sun, the intent and preoccupied traveler whose course could be deflected by a twig . . . it was great to live, to go, to see. . . .

His brown face was always bright when he entered an inn, when walking became difficult because of the dark; it was a sight to see him beat the dust from his clothes, beating them with hands so brown that they seemed gloved, to hear him call for supper and for drink. . . .

Every trace of Saxon was sloughed off; the original man stood unabashed; something of Spaniard, something of Italian perhaps. His nose, now that he had thinned and become hardy, lost its fatness and was to be seen as hawked, prominent in itself; his bushy black

eyebrows protruded over his eyes; for all his few years of manhood he looked durable, self-contained.

This last he was not: durable he might be, but self-sufficient never. He was utterly absorbed by that which passed about him, by that which was ever-changing and new. He had no time to think of himself. He had—now—no desire to think of himself, or of anything that concerned him. His ties had been insecure; he had, merely by departing, broken them entirely; home, his house, his father's house, was merely a place in which to eat and sleep; he had, true, a latent affection for his people, but, because of the long hours of bovine work, knew them little. Had he been forced to stop, homesickness would have nauseated him to the point of definite illness—as it did, later; now he was *going*, and it was all wondrous, all pleasant, everything made for happiness.

It was early summer before he reached Hamburg. A west wind, which had been blowing all day, had gone down with the coming of night; the air was deliciously warm, but not sultry. The *Prinzessin Martav. Preussen* sailed in the morning, the next morning, but this was night. Johann Meissing had dined well; it was delightful to be at the first end of his journey, to be without responsibilities, to know that at the other end of the voyage would be his Uncle Ludwig, that there would be not only new people but a totally new land ahead!

Even here, sitting under the stars, listening to the absurd music in a water-front beer-garden, it was wonderful. Meissing had never seen anything like it. He watched with interest the coming and going of the crowd, the foreign sailors from ships in the harbor,

some of them, even, Turks like the pictures in the mayor's books!

The music was vulgar; waiters with dissipated faces ran to and fro carrying beer or coffee or Hollands; heavy small-storekeepers sat corpulently over glasses of Lager; overdressed young men of enigmatic appearance, with oily thick hair, shifty eyes, and hands covered with rings, swaggered about smoking cigars, and talking in loud, ostentatious voices. A few women sat with the men about the round, spindly-legged tables, fat and garish, liberally powdered and painted, crowned with huge hats, beflowered and befeathered; there were children underfoot also, mostly hybrid, dark, swarthy, with bold blue eyes, shrill voices, who looked as if they had long received the ugly freedom of the streets, and learned lessons no children ought to know.

It was wonderful! Meissing had never heard such remarkably loud music, nor seen so many beautiful women, nor such a grand place. Always, when near a city, he had circled wide, and slept, as was fitting, in a *Wirthshaus*; it had taken him a good hour to enter Hamburg, but there was no way out of it; he had to get in, whether he feared the noise or not. The passage to New York had been less than he thought it would be: he was several gold marks in pocket; once in America, Uncle Ludwig would see to him until he found work. Was there not gold to be picked up, if one but walked out of the cities? Well, then!

Presently, as he sipped his beer, the band stopped playing, and there was a general movement of the throng toward a ramshackle barrack of a theater, under the shade of some thin-leaved trees; on the stage of it

a portion of the band was at work again, and upon the stage, as Meissing edged close to it, came two well-developed and aquiline-featured women of mature age, dressed as young children in white socks, short skirts which displayed frilled drawers, and muslin bonnets adorned with pink ribbons. They swayed to and fro and joined their voices in a duet, the words of which seemed to exhale a sort of obscenity. While they moved heavily, showing their muscular legs to the staring, goggling audience, they gazed eagerly about, seeking an admiration from which they might later draw profit. The music stopped; the two ran skittishly from the stages, taking small leaps into the air, and aimlessly blowing kisses.

Meissing sat down at a table close beside where he stood. He felt much the man-of-the-world: two other men were already seated there, and to one of them Meissing said, "Very fine girls!"

The man addressed shrugged his shoulders with a smile.

"You have seen a great many!" he said, and both he and his companion broke into chuckling.

"I have seen—" Meissing began, but stopped as the band began again.

This time a blowzy young woman, in orange and green, with short tinsel-covered skirts, bounded wearily on the stage, smiling, and commenced to sing:

*"Wärst Du mein Schätzelein,
wärst Du mir gut?
Steck die zwei Röselein
mir auf den Hut."*

As she sang she brandished two papier-mâché roses, and began to bound about, adding a chorus to each verse of "O la la, O la la," which Meissing's table-mates insisted was French, and extremely new.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"Wipe your mouth, baby. The milk drips from it!" he was told.

Meissing stood up.

"We will see about that!" he said shortly. "I do not permit any stuffed swine to speak so to me. Stand up, both of you, and I will show you the sort of thing we do in my part of the country."

"Oh, sit down," one of the men said wearily, but the other glared at Meissing.

"Step a little away from the table," the second said softly. "It will be upset in a moment, otherwise. By you, oaf." Seeing his intention, his companion rose likewise, and stepped around behind Meissing.

"Now," Johann thought, "we will find if I am as strong as I think I am. If there is a fighting, what will happen to me? The police will come, of course. And then what? They will ask my name, and I must give them the right one . . . and my village . . . and then where am I?"

He bowed choppily. "I am sorry," he said. "I take it back. Let us have no fighting. Let us——"

The belligerent man reached to the table, and threw the remainder of his glass in Meissing's face. "Perhaps *that* will make you fight," he snapped. "I do not like you. I did not like you from the moment you sat at my table——"

"Are they not all public?" Meissing asked placat-

ingly, although his eyes were angry, his muscles tense. "I did not know . . . I am very, very sorry. . . ."

"Is this not a brave countryman?" the other laughed. "Well, I'll let you off. First, countryman, get down on your knees, and polish my boots."

Meissing determined to keep the peace.

"Yes . . . assuredly . . . but with what?"

"With what, he asks! With your tongue, fool!"

Eyes were turned toward the wranglers, and Meissing took himself in hand. Better that, better anything, than to be jailed for fighting. He was to sail the next morning . . . what matter if he were laughed out of the place. Every one was watching . . . the girls on the stage were watching, and that made it the harder. He had enjoyed watching those girls . . . a fellow never knew that women had legs, in a village. . . . Well, what he must, he must.

He knelt, and looked about him, sick at heart.

His eyes caught those of a man seated close, at another little table. In that instant Meissing saw that this man was something different; he was smoking a dark-colored cigar which he took from his mouth with a hand that was very thin and brown. His face was darkened and burned by the sun, but looked startlingly haggard, as if it were yellow under the tan. He wore a mustache and was dressed in a rough cloth suit. He sat with his legs crossed, staring at Meissing with icy intentness; about his watching eyes were wrinkles, spraying downward over the cheek-bones and invading the cheeks. Their expression was bitter, those eyes; more than bitter, they showed a sort of frozen fierceness.

They told Meissing to stand, to stand and fight. Meissing gave back a pleading look, in which he tried to tell what he knew and felt, achieving only the look of a thrashed dog.

Abruptly he bent his head.

With that motion the gaunt man rose. Standing, he lost the appearance of height. He was shorter than Meissing, less stocky also, yet gave the impression of being more tried, more self-reliant. He took several rapid steps, and jerked the bowed head upright. He said some words in a language Meissing did not understand, and then the three—this stranger and Meissing's two former companions—glared battle; the foreigner's look lost none of its wildness, and before it the more belligerent of the Hamburg men raised his voice shrilly and defiantly, then began to examine the cold eyes boring into his own with fascinated glance. The dark man put the cigar into his mouth, rolled it from side to side, puffed smoke at his close opponent; the other looked away.

The waiter, who had been watching from a corner, approached with a tray of beer.

"What have we here?" he bellowed, as if aware of the argument for the first time.

"Nothing," the Hamburg man admitted weakly. "Nothing . . . I beg your pardon, sir," he added to the stranger.

Shrugging his shoulders, the foreigner turned to Meissing and took him to his own table, pushing his glass, almost filled with a pale yellow liquid, toward him.

Meissing drank.

Haltingly, and with many gestures, he whispered the tale, and the other was certain that something besides fear had moved Meissing. The muttered recital blundered on; only once did the other's eyes denote comprehension, only once did he understand; that was when Meissing mentioned the name of the ship. At that he patted his chest, and Meissing smiled delightedly, for the gesture could not be mistaken. At the end Meissing stood as if to go, but the stranger waved him down.

"We go—when we are ready," the other said in English—the language in which he had spoken before. "Otherwise—they laugh. When we have gone they cackle. '*Aed lle mae'r eang dangneff!*' Let them—and be damned."

The Welsh meant as much to Meissing as the English. He smiled, imitated the other by sitting quietly, nodded: "*Ja, gewiss!*"

This yellow stuff that Meissing had drunk was something unrelated to beer: in it was some essence that made the lights brighter. He seemed to expand within himself, and think thoughts which he could not catalogue. The grimacing dancing women grew more rounded and more beautiful . . . Meissing had never seen such wonderful women.

He forgot the incident from which the Welshman had rescued him. With a second glass or so he realized that he had known this dark man all his life. . . .

A languid lady, with face painted white as a wind-driven cloud, large mobile scarlet lips, eyes ringed with purple-black, and a gleaming, trailing dress that clung closely to her, writhed out and on the stage. The dress

stopped in a queer rounded abrupt curve at her bust and, instead of being tight, was looped loosely, and bound only by two shoulder-straps. As she danced she bent, and as she bent the audience could see two pale globes, intensified by the darkness of the gown.

Meissing's eyes wavered; his companion's stared as if unseeing.

He must not look. He would not look. He turned resolutely away, and gulped down another glass of the fiery yellow drink that bubbled in his veins . . . and, as if his head were pivoted and moved by machinery over which he had no control, turned slowly to watch.

Those twin circles drew him magnet-like.

The dancer swung into a quicker movement that swirled her dress high. In the pantaletted women with the short child's socks he had seen nothing more than a spectacle; there was nothing to arouse one in that, but as the dancing revealed columns of white skin his breath came fast. Here was something . . . concealed. Something one should not see!

In Wittelshofen you had nothing to do with girls, save a kiss or so. Then you married. When you married you had children. Like cows! You knew the girl you married as well as . . . as well as the village bull knew every heifer. Cows! Cows! Here was a strange woman, one you had never seen before . . . it was like walking into strange country. Hidden—and then unveiled for you.

The *Prinzessin Marta v. Preussen* was forgotten. Everything was forgotten, save the desire for that whiteness. For the dancer smiled at him as she danced away; smiled, and beckoned.

Meissing stood, pushing the table from him. Before him there remained the first disclosed portion of a woman he had ever seen—more, of a strange woman! His head felt queer. He wanted . . . he did not know what he wanted, clearly, but there was the woman of the frosted skin: dimly he was conscious that it might be a matter of his gold marks that remained, but what of that?

The Welshman looked at him curiously, grimly, but said nothing. Only when Meissing began to shuffle toward the opening in the barrack-stage did the other speak in his strange tongue:

“Sit, boy!” he said tonelessly, for all that he was but little older. “Sit. She will take—your last penny. Not that she’s not as good—as any other. Sit!”

Meissing did not hear him.

He reached the black doorway before the Welshman came up to him and grasped his arm; Meissing struck it away, unseeing, then, as the other took a fresh grip that held him, turned angrily. The two stood a moment so, while laughs whinnied through the rough audience; seeing Meissing so flushed of face, so fired of skin, the Welshman shrugged his shoulders disdainfully and dropped the captured arm. He seemed about to speak, able to throttle his words with effort. In that instant some one brushed past them both; with the footsteps on the brick threshold the white face of the dancer appeared out of the gloom within, and then was obliterated as a head swooped over her.

Meissing thought she smiled sardonically at him; his last look showed a white hand behind a man’s neck.

He stood like a stallion sensing combat. His nostrils

dilated ; intoxicated by anger and the heavy scents from the rooms within, dilated again and again. He drooped the next second, made an uncanny noise in his throat.

The Welshman passed an arm about his shoulders, and, his set face colder than ever, turned about, and walked with Meissing through the littered, table-dotted garden and out into the unlighted street. None found it wise to laugh until he had passed their table and his back only was toward them.

CHAPTER II

I

TWENTY-TWO days before, the saturnine Welshman—Owen Middleton—grinned wickedly in a place but little made for smiling, and, since the ground was blessed, should rightfully have let wickedness, even of expression, better alone. He was in the churchyard of the Mallwyd, in middle Wales; the land about it is moory, rocky, wild, towered by bare citadels of seamed rock walls, it is all *tir gwael*—mean land—and none meaner than the barren cemetery. The church itself is a small affair, unornamented, somber as the country—cold, severe, austere—a little brook washes its yard-wall on the south; there is no spire, but a small stone erection rises from the roof, protruding like a crab's eye, and in it hangs a bell. It is—of course—a church of the Church; your Methodists, in 1843, were contented to preach from wagons and carts, and glad to share the hills with wandering Paddies (although it was whispered that while Chester ale drew them none, that clear heavy brew of Llangollen did); it was the Church, but none too grand for that.

Eastward, upward from the moor, ran huge hills, barren, wild, without trees or verdure. At the eastern end is a deep black gorge, down which a brook stumbles white at every boulder-dam; a few miserable sheep pick

at the wretched herbage beside the rivulet. The rounded top of each hill reflected the sun, like polished blue-gray shields of Angle heroes. Cold might crack the rock, but in the crevices no silt gathered; all slid away into the roaring current or was blown far, like chaff. It was mean land; there was no living on it. It was a cold land, and barren; it gave cold and barren people, poetry wild as the cataract, minds barren as the rounded buttes. What a man had was in him: he was inarticulate, though none the less desirous; repressed, yet apt to burst through every dam of years in one tremendous outburst. . . .

Owen Middleton was grinning at the slate slab in the churchyard:

Er cof Gwen Middleton
 Gwraig Daffyd Middleton
 Monachlog Llanfair Mathafarn eithaf
 A fu farw Chwefror 26 1843
 Yn 51 Oed.¹

He was grinning, but not with pleasure; rather, it was a set expression, a mask plastered on for lack of a better. He made no apostrophe before the new grave on the bare ground, but as if the minutes he had spent there might prove dangerous, glanced about and down the moor uneasily, then picked up his bag, thrust the stick through the handle, and with never a backward glance left the place. Abstracted he was, for he stepped into the runlet and waded through, when a plank bridge

¹ To the memory of Gwen Middleton, wife of David Middleton, of the farm of St. Mary of Mathafarn, died February 26, 1843, aged fifty-one.

was but yards away—and never seemed to know that he was wet.

A whipping wind flattened the few spots of lush grass and crackled in the heather in protected corners as he strode along. His body seemed to sway from side to side as he walked with short choppy step; he seemed—from everything save his eyes—to be unhurried, to be some well-to-do farmer from a more fruitful portion of Wales—so his dress indicated—yet the former betrayed him. Something worried him; something drove him on, even as Johann Meissing had been driven. Here was a man, from every appearance, with his share in goodly quantity of courage, with a boldness indicated by his hooked nose and steady eyes, a man not in his middle twenties but already settled and grim; yet obviously a man fleeing, and in no happy spirit.

No cheering thought for him as there had been for Johann Meissing: he did not flee the army; he fled the noose.

A shower struck across the moor; the Welshman seemed of two minds, to continue, or head for a weak light to westward; his thoughts could have been read: "Shall I hurry on?" or "Let us risk it . . . I will not admit I am afraid!" and the second overcame caution; he wheeled, and, without breaking his stride, trotted in the new direction.

Three or four houses huddled together shabbily, close to the river; through the window of the largest—longest, for all were of a height—Middleton could see a good fire burning. He hesitated a moment, prey again to conflicting intents, then set his bag under an eave, and thrust the door open.

The landlady jumped from her chair, and bobbed him an irregular curtsey, an uneven thing, but the best that might be made by a woman with a wooden substitute for a flesh and bone leg. Three men sat by a table near the fire, jugs of ale near them; two sat on a bench, the third on a settle with high back, which ran from the wall just by the door, and shielded those by the fire from the draughts of the entrance. He of the settle jumped to his feet, said, "Master Owen!" and placed a chair by the fire, then resumed his own seat.

Middleton faced the landlady.

"*Cwrw da*," he requested. "Ale."

A second after it foamed into the jug he was lifting it to his lips.

The men had been talking loudly as he entered; now they seemed suddenly restrained, all save a stout young fellow, who kept his high-lows stuck into the room, and had no deference in his face; he was far into intoxication. Middleton knew him for a stone-cutter.

This fellow talked: not to say anything, but merely talking; since it was he that paid for the ale the other two listened. He was afraid, for instance, that the militia might be called out . . . he was willing to stand up to any number of men—all in Welsh—mark you, but to be shot by some one you could not see was something else . . . it was his duty and the queen would order it . . . he lapsed into silence, and seemed asleep, then woke with a start:

"Hee!" he ejaculated violently. "I have no broad acres——"

The man nearest him clapped a hand over his mouth.

There was silence a moment, but Middleton could not hold his peace. He stood up and shook the drunken man.

"I have," he said with some degree of violence. "What would you say of it?" He motioned to them to let the man speak.

The stone-cutter winked. "Hee!" he said indistinctly, and winked a second time.

"Sot!"

The word touched the stone-cutter off. He leaned forward and struck the table with his fist: "Sot . . . I am a poor stone-cutter. This is a rainy day. I come to pass the time. I am not so sober as I should be. Sot! My mother was Iwerddon—Irish—but . . . hee! I am better than some who are sober. A papist woman of the hills, my mother. Three-quarters naked, with children on her back!" Here he hiccuped twice, and started afresh—"But . . . she told of every one to the priest! Hee! There are some who can not say as much! There are——"

Middleton smashed him across the mouth.

He dropped threepence on the table, watched the stone-cutter slide under the bench, grinned as wickedly as he had in the churchyard. He opened the door and rain pelted in. . . .

2

Ellen was her name in our Lord, Davies that of her father in the flesh, a respectable collier's-worker near Mallwyd; good girl that she was, she carried her looks as easily as a packet of tea about the muddy ways of Mallwyd, went to church, went to market on Tuesdays,

gossiped in the dusk, was shy and simple as the day, pleased with flattery, as pleased with other trifles—trinkets from the Llangollen fair, notes slipped into the prayer-book, snatched kisses, a red-cheeked, pretty, shy simpleton of a country lass, who grows into the plump wife of the broadclothed churchwarden, bears a half-score children, gets flushed after midday dinner o' Sunday, and would sooner miss church than the postman any day in the year. At seventeen she was honestly handsome and honestly a fool.

She turned men's heads—two in particular. One—David Edwards—was a collier's man, a widower; he knew her speech, her habits, her ways of living: it was rumored that he would be a foreman before many years, and live in a cottage with four rooms. Her father drank with him on Saturdays, and in the tavern the plan was formulated. Ellen knew a husband was a part of things. She was not so sure of Edwards; he was thirty-seven or thirty-eight, his body was spare and wiry, his legs spindly and bowed at the knees, his cheekbones high and flushed (at the tavern), what hair he had grew on the back of his neck; the side eaves of his leather hat were always turned up, his waistcoat once had been buttoned (gone now) and a bright red (weathered brown); his breeches were dirty and yellow—but he would be a foreman, and old Davies liked him. It would be like having a crony in the house.

The other was Middleton.

Ellen was a handsome fool: let there be no doubt. There was no romance in her, though sentiment enough.

She was not long in making up her mind; even the thought of farm-life did not change her.

Middleton mutely raved of her: her frankness, the truth lucent in her eyes, her abounding receptivity—for she believed everything she was told and objected to little—her sweet long body, the grace of her head; he had been nourished on hard soil, and longed the more for the soft, the receptive, the suave, for that very reason. He loved to walk with her belted by his arm, to have her head on his shoulder, or have her chin lifted that eyes or lips might be kissed; his faltered endearments became more sure and positive. They would be married in April.

Here Davies brought his tools into play.

A man must have (he said) some pride in his condition. He did. Would he allow his daughter—the only one he had, unless he took it into his head to marry again, in which case—allow her to become nurse for pigs? to tickle a cow's teats? Middleton owned his farm—or his mother did, and the woman was sick to death, as every one knew—but would Edwards not be foreman shortly? Laugh that away! Visions of treated ale—at least until the marriage was a month past—hastened Davies. He knew the girl's passiveness, knew that she was a sieve of fact, but that much stopped in her head and, as it were, fermented. Bellying got him nothing. Edwards, on his part, might leer his face askew with desire, might boast of the way the other morts wanted him, but she walked with the cow-man notwithstanding.

It was a condition not to be borne.

He tried her with religion, with the honor due one's

parents. He even went to the prebend, but the churchman laughed him home: this rankled, he decided that when the Methodists held their grand camp-meeting that he would leave the Church.

In this he was wiser than he knew.

On a Sunday morning, in February of 1843, Davies heard singing as he sat to his bread-and-cheese and ale; he wasted no time in clapping on his Sunday hat, howling for Ellen, and following the worshipers to the edge of town.

The field in which the meeting was held was hard and crusty with black frost, under a bare elm a wagon stood, and from this a minister vociferated; Davies was unimpressed by the initial outburst:

"Drinking is no evil, brethren? If you'd get to Heaven and cheat the devil, never enter a public-house. Never fetch drink from one, either. Let nothing pass your lips stronger than tea. Become teetotalers, brethren! I am a teetotaler myself, thank God. I'll see Heaven, brethren! Will you? The devil is in drink! The devil jumps out of every glass! The devil'll take you and your wife and your children if you take to strong liquor. Come to Heaven with me . . . heh! you, sir! what are you muttering?" he broke off angrily—and brought all eyes to bear on a country fellow, who scraped a foot against the other nervously.

The man pulled his cap deferentially: "Nothin', your Honor," he grunted.

"Louder! Speak up!" the minister shouted.

"I said," the fellow answered, with all the soberness brought by discussion in some lonely place in the hills, "I said, 'How about the bread and wine?'"

The minister waved his hands high.

"Listen to the lushington!" he screamed. "The man denies everything! Where will he go? Where? To hell! That's where all toppers go! But you and I . . . we take the pledge, and go to Heaven . . . to Heaven . . ."

It was perfectly clear to most of them. They gave devout hums or loud earnest groans of agreement.

Davies decided that there was nothing to this business save that he must leave the inn alone—and this he had no intention of doing. He was bored; Ellen rapt.

At length a man of fifty, pock-marked, bald, began to speak; where the other had been loud, he spoke in a dry conversational tone, as if taking them all into his confidence. At first he continued in the same theme: drunkenness, or what he considered the same, drinking. Finally he lowered his voice: "And there is them that sells themselves, that hires their bodies, brethren! Before I got God I was bad; I was a thief, a drunkard, and worse. But there is one thing for which I thank Him. Never did he let me be a harlot!

"Now, brethren"—sinking his voice—"I know of a woman who gave herself into the arms of a man, and they had a child. And now she burns! And he burns. And the child burns! All because she forgot herself for one little minute—or maybe five at the most—that don't mean anything! It ain't worth it, brethren! Men, keep the lilies of Mallwyd spotless and pure. Remember hell-fire's hot, and lasts for ever, and the devil is always at his work, and heating up the caldron.

"There's an old saying, girls, that I want you to ask

your mothers about to-night, and never forget it. 'All good girls take advice from me, and never let a fellow see above your knee,' is the way it commences.

"And now let us sing, brethren, let us sing, and raise our voices in praise and submission, and after that Brother Williams will tell you of his experiences with a scarlet woman of London, and how he escaped, and how she was consumed."

3

When Ellen Davies and her father returned from the meeting he saw the girl was preoccupied; he let it go at that. Give the yeast a chance to work, he said to Edwards.

The suitor wanted to know what the plan was.

"Let be, let be," Davies insisted, since he had none.

Mallwyd went about its business; the iron works to the north sent its myriad sparks like fireflies into the air day and night, the enormous two-hundred-and-ten horsepower steam-engine thundered; the coal mine allowed its treasure to go into the furnace; the men labored at furnace and in pit; a baby was born to the Erwydd man and wife; the mother of Owen Middleton died; the ale at the inn turned malty for no reason at all. . . .

Gwen Middleton died the twenty-sixth day of February, with none by her save Owen her son, and she did not die happily. To her last minute she concealed something that she desired to say; her very finger-tips were blue before she gasped it partly out. They had been

silent; the son watching the flickering breath growing quicker and quicker, almost imperceptible in its shallowness; her lips moved.

Owen leaned forward.

"What is it?" he asked his hand traveling to the near glass of water.

She shook her head.

"What is it?" he said again.

"Your father . . . my husband . . . not . . ."

"Mother, mother—yes?" as she stopped.

Her eyes steadied; she lay without moving, and seemed to be listening to him with fixed strained attention.

Not until he whispered her to continue did he realize that she had died.

As heritage she left him some hoarded gold coins, which she had kept hid against famine-years, the farm of St. Mary's of Mathafarn and all that it contained, and the few hardly-wrung words. For lack of the last Owen would have forgone the first two, and more.

He saw that she was decently buried, and promised the prebend that he would look at the grave . . . in a day or so.

Then, full of his troubles, he went to Ellen.

She was alone; the leaven of the camp-meeting had been working in her, although the kiss seemed lacking in nothing.

"Owen," she said, pushing him back, "have you no desire . . . to . . ."

Gathering words for what he meant to tell her, he merely nodded for continuance.

"Owen," she flung defiantly, "'tis a sin to kiss . . .

before marriage." He did not answer, and she went on, hesitating, "I have no mother, Owen. But the Good Men say that when a man kisses . . . he . . . wants . . . more. . . ."

"Aye!"

She shrank back.

"You do want more?"

"Aye . . . but we must leave . . . Mallwyd, Ellen——"

"Unmarried!" she hurled at him.

The work had been well done: evil she saw in everything concerned about their love; she covered her face and cried, although (not that she admitted it) the thought of sin was . . . hot and pleasant.

"Ellen—I must tell you," he began; sat in a chair, got up. He was beginning to tremble. Was it coming to him at last then, the breakdown from sleepless days and foodless days since his mother's death, the breakdown that he had—somehow—kept at a distance? Determined not to shake, he exerted his will violently, until he felt dimly as if he were with difficulty holding, keeping together, a multitude of living, struggling things which were trying to get out of his grasp. And these things were the multitudinous parts of the whole which was himself.

"I do not want to hear!"

"Ellen——"

"You have not had me, but you desired it! You did! You did! You said as much yourself."

Her cheeks were flushed with the very talking of it; had he glanced up he would have taken her in his arms and made an end to argument. But his eyes

were fastened to the shining pan hanging directly opposite him; on it reflections from the fire made vermilion arabesques that changed as he tried to trace their position. He knew that he had not made himself clear; that the girl drove at something utterly apart from that which he must say, and yet dovetailed into it, although she could not know that.

He stood up and put an imperative hand on her wrist; it seemed to add fever to his fever.

"Father will be coming," she said suddenly, as if nothing had gone before. "Drink some tea. And cake from the store," she added in a casual voice, pushing a plate to the end of the table.

He took one and ate. He had regained self-control, but knew that he must keep tight rein, or every trace of manhood, of personal dignity, would be utterly lost. Yet he must speak, and quickly.

"Ellen beloved," he said huskily, "thank you for the tea. But it was not tea even of your brewing that brought me."

"What, then?" she asked.

"My mother——" and stopped.

"Your mother?" she prompted.

He hurried into it at last. "When she died, Ellen—and she was good to me—when she died, she kissed my hand, and begged forgiveness! She told me——"

The girl drew back, sensate.

"She told me that my father . . . was not my father. That——"

"She sinned!" The girl spoke involuntarily. The religion poured into her seeped out, nor could it have been stopped.

"Aye. She sinned, I suppose . . . Ellen, will you have me as I am?" He licked his lips. "I need not have told you. You would never have known——"

"Until I burned in hell!"

"That's foolish, Ellen."

"The minister said the Big Man cast those into hell——"

"It is loving us in our troubles that He is!"

"It was sin. And you are the offspring of sin."

He had nothing for that. Goodness, it seemed, had cast him out, and so far he had not even anything to substitute for it. He was on the edge of an abyss, but need not fall therein; he burst into hot words; they might leave Mallwyd for a time, so that if it ever got out—which was impossible, for none knew—they might find this by letters from home. He loved her, and she loved him; they would be married . . . only give him some one to love, and to help him in his trial. . . .

Her hand touched him first; soon her arm was about him. Calculating she was not; she did not think in that moment that it might be a secret; she did not actually think, save that it was sweet and dear to surrender to him, and be held close; she was jealous of the dress of hers against his breast.

Neither heard the door open as they stood embraced.

The words seemed torn from her: "I . . . I love you, Owen. It does not matter. No one knows. Even if your father . . . your mother . . . if they . . . if she . . ."

"She must have loved—that other man, who was

really my father—she must have loved him—greatly. She must—have been——”

“She must have been a whore, eh, Middleton?” snickered Edwards from the doorway. “Hee! what a tale for——”

Before he could finish his sentence Middleton came upon him. His face was distorted; under the burden of the last few days and nights it was shrunken and sharpened, and it had in it the look of fierceness characteristic of the faces of starving people. He had freed himself of the girl with a strange and gentle pressure on her shoulders, leaped to the door and pushed Edwards with violence into the house, followed him back.

“Lock the door!” he whispered to Ellen. “Lock it! Lock it!”

“But——”

His voice rose savagely.

“Lock it, I tell you!”

Since she still hesitated he jumped to it himself, and his bony hand dropped the bolt to place.

Ellen was terrified by the face of her lover; she caught hold of the edge of a chair, and her whole body began to shake.

The men faced each other. They were nearly of a size; Middleton an inch or so taller, but the other more broad and squat, built powerfully close to the ground.

“*Bawddyn!*” Middleton snarled. “You dirty scamp!”

The other was unafraid; he had landed uppermost in many a brawl; his nails had torn many a cheek—

not for nothing would he be made foreman. He did not answer, but, what was worse, laughed again, throwing into it everything—and more—that he might have put into words.

Middleton stood with his hands hanging at his sides, impassive, his head bent and the lids drooping over his eyes. The silence continued. Middleton remained motionless, while Edwards moved his feet and hands ceaselessly, his eyes never leaving Middleton's face. The silence lasted so long, Middleton stood so absolutely still, that Edwards began to feel uneasy, even faintly fearful. The nerves in his body began to tingle; they were braced to encounter violence, but this immobility and dumbness tormented them. He could not be—was not—cognizant of the fires that raked Middleton; it came to him at last that the man was past insult; that he was a farmer, and hence beyond insult.

He glanced at Ellen, and believed that now all might be decided—and for the best.

"So that's what you are!" he said, and stared into Middleton's haggard face. "So that's what you are!"

The handle of the door leading to the muddy street was turned, the door was shaken, and there came a knocking on the wood. Ellen started frantically for it; she felt she could breathe no longer in this room; Middleton made a crooked-arm gesture to wave her back.

Edwards proposed to allow no advantage of this scene to leave him: a stage was set, and upon it he proposed to strut; he laughed again, and said to Ellen, "The man is . . . what you would suppose! Will he fight before a girl he wants? Hee! not him! Says I,

then, can he be made to? Says you, I guess not. I call him what he is. Being that, he says nothing. A Welshman? Not even an Englishman—and they fight little enough! Now I tells him to get out, and stay from the public-house, where I will give the story—after you and I have chatted a bit, my girl.” He grinned widely, showing yellow fangs. “Still here, son o’ sin?” He stepped close, gathered his spittle in his mouth, and sprayed the drooping man.

The insult had no effect; all was as if the additional degradation had not been offered. Middleton made no effort, even, to wipe his face. His eyes remained closed, his hands hung listlessly at his side.

From the moment of Edwards’ first words Middleton had acted instinctively; from the first burst of wild anger he had sloughed into despond, had seen pictured before him what it all meant: he knew that this rat would roll the morsel long on his tongue, and that other rats would enjoy the savor fully as much. He did not know what to do . . . he did not care what he did . . . that Ellen heard all of it, slimily from the fellow’s tongue . . . must be expected. Yet, now that the fact was out, he felt that it was a cruelly level finale; presently he came under this new fascination, the fascination of a cool and clear presentation of undressed statement. He even penetrated into shadows that his next unwise step would force him; he wondered if the judge would declare him innocent or guilty. . . .

He tried to be scrupulously fair to Edwards. The fellow meant two things: he would, first, take Ellen from him—and he felt certain that had the girl been

willing to stand at his side she would do it *now*; second, the story of love would become a vile bandied thing, his mother worse than a harlot, he . . . what he was. He gave full weight to that, to both, and found but one answer.

A sudden strong vitality surged through him and, for the first time since he had locked the door, he looked squarely up. His words were cold, and therefore the more frightful.

"Edwards," he said, "I am going to kill you."

The stone-cutter found this laughable.

"Words! Words!" he sneered, and, seeing Middleton tense, sprang suddenly, raked the other's face with a clawing hand, clinched, carrying Middleton backward and from his feet.

The girl covered her face with her hands, backed against the nearest wall; the fingers, one by one, were forced involuntarily apart, and she watched. . . .

Middleton swayed, lost balance and fell, Edwards on him, with hands horribly busy about the other's neck. The stone-cutter found time to drive a knee into Middleton's stomach, breath hissed through the fallen man's nostrils from the impact. He was able, notwithstanding, to get his arms around Edwards, to lock his fingers, and attempt to roll from side to side; as the stone-cutter's fingers tightened about his neck he was possessed of demoniac force; he changed his rocking motion abruptly, pitching with all his power to the left. The torturing fingers loosened, and at that instant Middleton threw his right hand beneath Edwards' chin; they clung; then, slowly, rolled so that they lay side by side with intertwined arms.

Middleton smashed the evil face so close to his, the short distance lent no strength to the blow, but it drove the other from him a moment, and Middleton scrambled to his knees.

The stone-cutter had no desire for a distant combat; he flung his arms about the near ankle and brought Middleton down again, above him, but face upward. Middleton's neck was close to the stone-cutter's mouth, and, with a roar, the older man brought his teeth together in it. Blood spurted.

Middleton's upturned face made no grimace of pain, his lips uttered no sound, although the stone-cutter, tasting blood, squealed like a horse. Before Middleton could squirm around the under-man brought a heel agonizingly into his side, a hobnailed heel that ate into flesh and left its imprint.

He was impervious to pain. Edwards was satisfied with their position, he was content to roll on the floor, to scratch and bite, always seeking to maim the other: Middleton was not. He wanted the fellow on his feet. He wanted to smash him down . . . to smash him . . .

For a second time he heaved himself upward, and took a kick in the small of the back for it. But he was free, clear, and ready for Edwards when the stone-cutter came at him. Edwards started to dart close, and, as Middleton's fist drew back, stopped, swooped down a hand to the warming-pan beside the hearth, and swung it. Missed.

Middleton was very cold. His hands were sweaty—cold sweat. He began to circle about Edwards like a malemute; his face was cold, expressionless, murder-

ous: he was aware that, when he closed, Edwards would make no attempt to dislodge him, but welcome a close grip. At such a game the stone-cutter was his master. Well—there would be no further game. He was willing to take what the other would give him, for one smash at that leering face . . . he went forward, and as Edwards clawed for his eyes brought his right and left fist precisely to the other's chin, near the ear.

Edwards went down.

Middleton did not stop an instant; he reached for the nearest heavy chair, and swung it high to finish his business.

Ellen screamed.

Her scream did not stop him, but something in the grotesqueness of the fallen man's position did; his head had hit the bricked edge of the open hearth, and from under it came a small, steady, crimson rivulet, already making a pool where an unevenness in the floor dammed it.

"I said I would!" Middleton muttered.

Ellen screamed again, and ran into the cottage's other room, he after her. He was in no wise dazed; all was clear, and he spoke distinctly: "Let us go, Ellen. Gather some clothes. Let us go."

She backed from him, and whispered, "No . . . no . . ."

It came to him that, along with the rest, he had fought for her, and he tried to take her in his arms. She would have none of it, but pushed him away. Had he been hot from the conflict he might have taken

her by storm; she had been deeply moved; the touch of him close would have fired her blood, and she could not have resisted.

"Come," he said again, and was satisfied to stand apart from her.

"Murder on your soul!" she breathed.

He had no answer for that, but abruptly: "His hand struck me first."

"Murder," she repeated. "Owen, Owen, you must get close to God! And your mother's sin sets on you, also. It'll set on me, Owen. This death'll set on me if I go. I'll be a sinner, Owen." The camp-meeting had done its work: "I'll roast in hell, Owen——"

"Along with me, then."

"I can not . . . I can not. . . ."

"You love me, girl!"

"I . . . oh, Owen, I love your kisses . . . they fright me and make me happy . . . but this . . . I will not sin! I will not go to hell! I will not . . ."

He stepped close, calculating that he would take her as she was; clothes could be obtained later, in some other village. If he had but passed an arm about her all would have been well, and the citadel captured. . . .

"From the window I saw!" he heard Davies pant, as he brushed into the room; "I thought it'd never unlock, although late I've often jiggled the catch open. . . . Did you not hear me knock, Ellen? Had you let me in, this would never have been. Man, man, fighting to the death over a girl, and she mine. The death of me, it will be . . . say something for yourself, Middleton. And hands off the girl!"

Middleton's eyes slitted, and something snapped:

"He's dead, aye. As dead as you will be, Davies, if ever you say a word of my mother——"

He could have choked that back, but it was out.

Out, and any fool could guess the rest, even without worming the story from the girl.

"Ellen!" he pleaded once more, but she hid her head.

4

Home he went, and fast; why he went to view the new grave he never knew, but something drew him; at the rough inn beyond the moor he knew that Davies had told the story . . . and that the word was out. None save an officer would arrest him; who were the rest to worry over the matter of a killing, or the queen's business, either?

Mallwyd he dare not stay in; he wondered who would feed the cattle; some one, surely . . . St. Mary's was gone to him, all was gone save the purse of gold coins, and that must take him far, and out of England. He had been north and south; why he struck for the south he was uncertain, save that it made it possible to stick to the mountains. It was the longest way from Wales; it would be figured that he would take the near route out; good, he would get into Swansea and then away: Swansea, or possibly Cardiff. What matter which?

A vastly different exodus from that of Johann Meissing: black and barren wind-swept moors, roaring rivers crossed by old hanging bridges, a hard land and hard people; there was nothing outside of himself, and

in his own thoughts he lived by necessity; in three short weeks he became morose, precociously grave and bitter. Public-houses he avoided, eat he did, but never more than once a day, and always in some poor farmhouse.

The people of South Wales spoke more English: he was glad that his mother had insisted upon his using her mother-tongue at home. . . .

Now and again, far from the hills, he glimpsed bits of fruitful valleys, groves of dull green trees, but about him were nothing save alternate bleak heights, sparse of even heather, and the never-ending black moor. Villages he avoided. A Mallwyd proverb had been "Three things come unaware upon a man, sleep, sin and old age." Sin he had upon him, old age was inevitable, but sleep was refused. He was herded in one night by drovers who came upon him, men in brown coats, yellow-topped boots embroidered with caked mud, low-crowned, broad-brimmed hats; one tallowy-faced drover found the slight Mallwyd man worth deviling. . . . "Coom," the drover cried, moments later, "coom, neighbor, I and thou shall be friends. . . . Where did'st get th' poonch?" . . . They left him alone, and in the morning departed, after he had shared their meal.

Irish wanderers in the hills . . . women, red of hair and wild of mien, rude, stupid, with sharp knowing faces . . . he could not sleep near them, not even for the warmth of their fires. . . .

Bleak mountain, black moor. . . . Swansea at last.

He took a room near the water. He was weary, half sick; he felt that the easiest thing to do would be to

die. He was uprooted, could he be transplanted? If he lived, he must take a grip on life somehow. If he chose to die, how would Ellen take the news? . . . He was very young.

He had never been angry before, but toward Edwards he still had the same frozen, terrible hatred. His feeling toward Ellen had not crystallized, but already he felt that she had not been willing to love. He had not wanted her to suffer with him, but to help him . . . if she loved him there was no reason why she should have suffered. People were selfish: good, he could be selfish also.

Fear of capture was past him. He had gone straight to his room that night.

He washed and lay down on his bed; he could not sleep, and soon got up and went to the window. A gust of wind came to him from the sea. He had only to cross that sea and a continent was ready to receive him and to hide him. That sea . . . he might cross any sea . . . he slipped on his jacket and went down to the barroom. When, he asked, did the next boat sail? For where? For . . . America.

They laughed at him, the barman and the room's one guest; ships did not put out from Swansea for America! What was he a-thinkin' of? Now the thing for him to do . . . was the last thing he had any intention of doing. Did not the English bobbies know the face of every criminal in Britain? Was he a fool?

Somewhere else, then?

There was a boat for Germany the next day, they told him; from there he might take passage across the ocean. Latent wisdom came to him, and he simu-

lated drunkenness, reeling back to his room again, and this satisfied them.

As he sat at his window the wind died away.

Its last breath seemed to draw him after it, to tear him from all that he knew and understood; for the first time he realized fully that he was apart—and must remain apart—from everything that he had once known and loved; that he might speak to none of his hopes, his pains, his plans. . . .

Plans? What plans! What difference where he was, or what he did? He was himself, and all that counted was inside of himself. He felt no joy in embarking for a strange place with strange sights, nor sorrow at the leaving of his own land behind. He needed no one. He wanted no one. He was secure in himself. So very certain was he of this last that he went to the bed, flung himself on the evil-smelling counterpane and cried.

He was young; nineteen, and yet he was a man, he knew. In this moment there flooded over him that which he had missed, given up—no, that which was taken from him. Why should he pay for what his mother . . . yet she had paid, likewise; he had seen that in her agonized eyes before she gasped the words to him. She had said something of his father, her husband, and then the fatal “not.” The word could have but one meaning, and that not to be mistaken. “Not”—it would mean nothing else. But suppose—suppose it *had* meant something else! What, he did not know—had he been quick to imagine what was not so—to place an evil construction where none existed? The trickle of blood from beneath Edwards’

head seemed to surround him and blind his eyes. Gulping, he wished for the touch of Ellen's body against him, comforting, kissing; for Mallwyd with a blazing sun fading into mist and turned to gold, to carmine, to purple . . . for cold and brilliant stars, and the cows murmuring in the shed . . . for Ellen. . . .

He turned, and stared at the ceiling; never showed sorrow again.

In the morning he sailed for Hamburg.

CHAPTER III

I

A STRANGE pair, at the wharf just above Desbrosses Street; the larger seemed unusually dependent upon his companion, yet even the casual eye could see that here were two greenies—Johann Meissing and Owen Middleton. The former was cheerful, buoyant to overflowing; it was a word to conjure with, America! it was a thought to make breasts swell and hearts beat faster; surreptitiously, Meissing examined the interstices between the cobbles for gold: gold he did not see, but was it not wonderful to think that these very stones might have come from the hills where gold was found, even if the yellow metal was not actually underfoot now? No such sense of elation brightened the Welshman; here, New York, was simply another such place as Hamburg or Swansea . . . or any other city. He had outgrown the loneliness that originally assailed him and choked his being; he was as past lonesomeness as he was beyond sorrow.

After the twenty-odd days on the *Marta v. Preussen* the two could talk together after a fashion, or rather Meissing picked up English words and used them, and made out to understand the few utterances of his companion. Uppermost in Meissing's thoughts was what he was going to do, and he spoke of it often, at first

in German, while the other listened without understanding, later in broken English larded thickly with German words and idioms; he would make more money than the richest landowner about Wittelshofen, and would return in great state; that was it, but the tale was gorgeously embellished. Just how he was going to do this he was uncertain, but did not every one in America become rich?—It was difficult to understand that such a thing as a beggar should whine for alms outside the wharf-house; were there poor in America also? “Es ist nicht goot,” he said—satisfied that it was English—when a dock-laborer elbowed them to one side. He was still cheerful but a little dazed; here every one had much business, and hurried into it tremendously.

Middleton was satisfied to enter the first lodging-house whose sign swung over the sidewalk, the Jersey House. Meissing would not hear of it: had he not an Onkel Ludwig? was it not his own uncle? did a man owe nothing to his relatives? would not Onkel Ludwig be glad to hear of home again? More, was not Owen his good friend, that had stood by him in trouble? Well, then!

“*Er wird in's Wirthshaus gehen, sagt er!*” Meissing shouted.

“Dutchy!” a street urchin mocked.

Meissing grinned: “*Ja, Deutsch. Komm 'mal her, Junge . . . koom over by uns, Kerl . . . boy . . . verstehst du nicht Englisch?*”

The boy thumbed his nose at him and danced away, singing, “Dutchy, Dutchy! Beer'n busty!” with more vigor than rhyme.

"Better let me—do the talking," Middleton said.

"*Du verstehst mein Englisch, lieber Freund, aber dis boy . . . es ist . . . Ich . . . I . . . I have Englisch nicht so schlecht . . . bad . . .*"

"You do well, Johann. I guess some. In days more—you will speak like a—native."

"Native? *Was ist das*, native?" . . . and so, up Desbrosses Street, the lesson continued.

Zwei-hundert eins und vierzig Strasse Acht—what for a name of a place to live was that? The 'two hundred' Middleton had readily understood, but the remainder of the name had to be counted out on Meissing's fingers for him—on the steamer, days back—before the whole was unmistakable: 241 Eighth Street; that was where Onkel Ludwig Meissing lived. And Onkel Ludwig, mark you, was rich: did he not send home presents that went the length and breadth of Wittelshofen? *Ach!* the Indian's head painted upon a leather skin was even exhibited in the *Rathaus* itself, and there were many who insisted that the hide was that of the selfsame Indian portrayed upon it. . . .

Even Middleton was taken aback by their walk; he never stopped any of the passers-by to ask the way to Eighth Street, but took his directions from the corner saloons; now and again they were minutes getting away, for Meissing would be guessed for what he was, and the German bartender ask myriad questions . . . steadily, however, they neared the place for which they searched. The polyglot people of the ferry-street changed subtly. No longer did they see ringed-eared Italians or bearded Russians; faces became less swarthy and more pale. The houses were cleaner, less smoky;

at each pretentious one Meissing wondered if it belonged to Onkel Ludwig, but Middleton hurried him on. The Welshman had it in mind to get his friend to the right place, and then find lodging elsewhere; he did not want to see joyous faces . . . he wanted no thanks.

There were, in the late afternoon sun, leisurely walkers on the streets, and ladies who drew aside to let the rough foreigners pass without touching their skirts, dandies who swiftly stepped between them and the oncoming pair. Lords and ladies, Meissing believed. Here were your Americans, and they were all rich! But he had some doubts now; the outlanders they had seen before were not so rich—possibly the Americans made all the money. *Pfui!* he was growing foolish; there were no real Americans except the Indians—and would *they* wear high hats and varnished whiskers?

They turned a corner.

"It should be here," Middleton muttered. "The fellow said it would be—here." He stopped, and examined the doorplate on the little corner shop: 241 Eighth Street. "This is it," he said to Meissing.

Meissing's face fell. "*Es ist ein . . . business!*" he blurted. Then, "*was steht . . . was* says de . . ." he pointed, unknowing of the word, to the painted sign in the window.

"Louis Meissing," Middleton read, without commenting.

It must be the one, that was clear; why had his uncle changed the good German name? "*Es ist French name!*" Meissing said, a bit proud that he re-

membered the "French" from hearing a ship so described while they had been on the water.

"Aye. And Welsh. Lewis."

"Goot! *Für uns beide*. For de—both of us!"

He took one more look at the string of sausages in the window, sighed sadly, thinking that his uncle might just as well have lived in one of the great brick houses with the railed stairs, and drew Middleton in with him.

As he opened the door a bell jangled. The store was empty, but before they could look curiously at the tubs of fish, the strange jars and canisters—all painted with ships and women and flowers!—the potted meats arranged in high triangles; before they could do more than scrape their feet in the sand of the floor a curtained door at the other end opened, giving them a glimpse of a second sanded floor and a long bar, with good barrels behind it; before they could even get to the counter a paunched, red-cheeked man entered, went behind the counter briskly, and said:

"What is it, please?"

Johann examined him carefully; there was no doubt about it—Onkel Ludwig. The fat did not show in the pictures, of course, but it was the same face. He became suddenly bashful, then, since he was young, attempted concealment.

He spoke very slowly and carefully: "*Es*—it is Herr Ludwig Meissing himself?"

"No other. Well, countryman, *was willst du?* Here we have everything."

Meissing could hold it back no longer.

"Onkel Ludwig!"

The storekeeper dropped a pudgy hand to the counter heavily.

"*Kleiner Johann!*" he ejaculated. "Now big Johann! My brother's boy!"

He was lost behind a showcase on the counter, and then appeared at the near end, and the two stood embraced, each patting the other's back.

Then Ludwig Meissing called vociferously, "Minnie . . . Walter . . . Andrew Jackson . . . come see your cousin from Germany! My Minna is not to house, Johann; oh, but your aunt will be glad to see you—she will talk you the ear off!"—Before he was through talking Minnie and Walter and Andrew Jackson trooped in, to line behind their father timidly, and gawk at their old-country cousin.

Ludwig Meissing named them, a hand on each head: "Now, back to your lessons!" he ordered, and, to Johann, "We try a little American beer, nephew. Not so bad . . . not so bad . . . and I own a little piece of the brewery from which it comes——"

No word as to what brought him, Middleton thought. No word as to why *he* had come along, either. But the uncle knew instantly that Johann was of a size for the army: what more reason needed a man? He himself had left earlier, and would have returned for a visit, but for that.

Middleton patted his friend's shoulder, and, wordless as ever, started for the door.

A torrent of words stopped him, addressed both to the elder Meissing and himself: here was his friend . . . did friends depart so . . . there was much to be considered for the future . . . friends they were, and

friends they would remain; all in German, but Middleton knew their meaning from the tone. He shook his head, smiled and tried to draw away.

"A glass of beer anyway," Ludwig Meissing said persuasively. "Then—we see."

2

The sitting-room behind the store was warm, cozy; in it were Minna Meissing's treasures: a black tray with red cabbage-rose, the china cow from home, the fluted-edged shell on the sideboard along with several blue steins and one of pewter, the red hangings of the window, already faded pink on the inner border by the sun; the blue-and-crimson checked table-cloth; the very lazy-daisy embroidered designs on the rocking-chair backs exuded comfort and inward satisfaction. And why not? Did not the store pay the rent and the living? Was not the bar-money banked the first of every week—for all were too busy to leave on a Saturday—to swell the total? Did not Ludwig have dealings that invariably brought him to her joyously, to say, "*Mutter*, another hundred or so, all for letting an honest man have money with no security!"

Johann worked in the bar or in the store, and gave his uncle more time for his outside business. He delivered rush-twisted baskets of groceries to the neighboring brick houses, whose maids christened him as 'John'—and soon John he became. "You see how it was," Ludwig told him. "They would not call me Ludwig . . . and what difference does it make?"

On Sundays he would take his stick, bellow while still in his room for Middleton; together they would

walk past far Forty-second Street and into the country, or take the ferry across the wide river. Middleton had refused employment in the brewery Ludwig was interested in; he had, however, been forced genially to oversee the care of the horses that drew the great trucks; he was honest, punctilious to a fault, driving both animals and workmen implacably. He always drank, at the noon-hour, alone. He was not liked by his fellow-workmen, a strange mixture of Germans and Irishers . . . they did not know him as Welsh, but as English; the English were too smart, yes, sir, too smart! Two dollars of his twelve he gave Mother Meissing for his room and two meals. Most of the rest he gave Ludwig, never asking what was done with it, never caring.

He was glad his work exhausted him so he might sleep.

He spoke little: sometimes not a dozen times a day, and six of this to his horses. . . .

They would walk far on their Sunday excursions up the Hudson, stopping at noon for dinner at some tavern; work-girls smiled at them and, had Meissing been alone, he would have stopped. The other never looked, but stared straight ahead. It worried Mother Meissing. She tried to get him a girl; there was the blonde *Mädchen* in the bakery: she could bake and sew and cook, and knew how many pennies made a dollar; she would have done for her Owen. Johann was different; the girls were always setting their caps for him, the boy needed *watching*, not prodding.

Middleton liked to stop high in the rock-cliff, and stare moodily at the water below; he preferred some

spot where the current ground into the hillside and bore out the dirt ruthlessly.

Before the first year had passed Meissing's speech was as good as his friend's; after two there remained no trace of accent. His dress was American, spotless. On Sunday he was a dandy, thanks to Aunt Minna. She even overlooked Middleton's wardrobe and drove him relentlessly to the stores when ruffles became frills. . . .

In the second year Owen became interested in one thing—money. His doubt as to the meaning of his mother's last speech had crystallized; he found a dozen different interpretations. His own mind had been evil! He did not regret killing Edwards. It had been fair—more, the stone-cutter had attacked him. The thought of his mother's name a byword for infidelity, bandied by itinerant ministers, used as a "moral lesson"—mouthed in the public-house—and it was not true! He would go back to Mallwyd and confound them; he would investigate, search out the facts.

To do this he must have money. Money for a solicitor, for legal aid; enough for the best; he must be cleared of the murder charge first of all—then he would force Mallwyd to acknowledge his good name; he must have much gold. With it all was possible, all, at least, that he desired.

He was making money in New York, but listened breathlessly of the tales of fortunes made in the West—Chicago, and in Missouri.

There was too much to do that was ceaselessly new for John Meissing to become very restless. To everything he touched he brought zest. He felt, in these

first years, that everything was right if he could get it right; he did his work with a sort of joyous energy, and devotion, and found time to help Aunt Minna in the kitchen. If he plucked a chicken he sang at it, if he swept it was only to make dust on the ceiling the way he swung the broom. Some Saturday nights he went to the theater; it was part of his routine to straggle past drawn-blind houses two blocks away. . . .

Even while he did not know it, he was restless; he thought he was completely satisfied, settled; the slow march past the dark houses—from which never a sound came—proved otherwise. He did not even recognize it as a symptom. Life was good, Uncle Louis was good, Aunt Minna was good . . . it was good to stretch one's legs in the thick grass up the river, and have one's companion close by, pipe in mouth. . . .

"Owen," he said, on one of the Sundays, "Owen, soon we get married, yes?"

"Why?"

"Well, a man gets married——"

"Haven't you a good bed, and plenty to eat? Doesn't Aunt Minna care for you better than any wife?"

"Yes," uneasily. "But there is something . . . else."

Owen puffed at his pipe.

"Think you, Owen, I am a fool? Never, have I had a woman!"

"Nor I."

"The boys—you should hear them talk, now, Owen, in the bar! They say if a fellow doesn't—you know—he gets sick."

"I'm no doctor."

"But—a man should get married!"

Owen stared at him. "Do you . . . have you found the girl?"

"No," John admitted. "I see lots I like, though."

"Take one, then," his companion counseled. "Take any one, John—and when you're ready—leave her!"

The other looked at him.

"Before I left home"—a subject Middleton had never mentioned—"before I left home . . ."

"Yes?"

"Is there nothing in the world save women—and brats?" the other snapped. "Women—and brats—and eager men!"

"*Ja!* Eager men, Owen. I think that I am eager, maybe. You know that big Anna, who works on Ninth Street? Anyhow, I brought her the things Max forgot to deliver. We were talking, not about anything. As she held the back door open for me to go I—something happened inside of me, Owen. I kissed her. Not so good a kiss, I guess. Like a baby's, she must have thought. She giggled. I kissed her again. She didn't giggle that time! It made me feel . . . you know how it made me feel——"

"I don't!"

He did.

"It was not so when I came first to New York. In Hamburg, that night we met, I was foolish, maybe drunk a little. But now, I ought to be settled. I ought to be a papa. *Gott!*" he shouted, losing control, "must I have all the strength in my arms for nothing?"

"A man in the stables was telling me of a fellow in Chicago——"

"I do well here, Owen! You, too. Uncle Louis invests your money safe. It grows. We get to be big men some day, I guess. It would be foolish——"

Middleton looked at him critically.

"Big, yes, John. I think you're going to be big—fat—like Uncle Louis," he said honestly.

3

John belonged to the *Schützenverein*; he liked the three-cornered hat with sweeping plume that membership entitled him to. The meetings and the target practises, the marchings, countermarchings, standings at attention until one's legs and arms throbbed—that was no fun, but at the picnics across the river: beer tasted better in the open, and never else were there such sausage and kraut, such potato salad, such thick, cream-filled *Torte*—*Nuss-Torte*, *Sand-Torte*—until you wondered where they went, and then hot coffee. . . .

It was the middle of May, three years after he had left Wittelshofen; the snow was gone and every tree gauded blossoms in promise of later fruit; apples, thin, sparse almonds, scraggy pear with hard buds; behind the orchard a prim cypress-hedge enclosing the beer-garden, and giving access to it only through cuts, rounded at the top, through the green. The river below was still gray, dirty ice clung in the minute bays made by outstretched arms of the cliff, but around him the grass was thick, soft to the feet, and, where the sun struck all day, warm.

John was flushed with beer, with food, with dancing.

He watched them moving to some waltz in the open-side pavilion, and was half minded to join them.

Was he getting fat, he wondered? Fat, like Uncle Lud—Uncle Louis? Uncle Louis had done well, was doing well; a full half of the brewery was his. He, John, had done well also; was not some of the brewery-money his own; could he not walk into the vat-rooms and have the workmen tip their hats to him? In Wittelshofen, who tipped their hat to a peasant? *Donnerwetter*, but he had been forced to scurry out of the way of the nobilities' horses! Here was something like! And was he not about to become a citizen, a real *Amerikaner*?

The letters from home brought him vast and entire satisfaction, largely because of the contrast they offered: what was life in the sleepy little village compared with what he had now? Aunt Minna always brought them out after dinner, and, if Owen were in the room, translated each sentence into English, clear from the "*Meine Lieben!*" to the name signed at the end, while Louis Meissing alternately grinned or grunted, according to how the news affected him.

It was hot (or cold); the goslings had just hatched (or a goose was killed for Sunday dinner); so-and-so had died (or a child born); the crops promised well (or poorly); a cousin, or a niece, or a nephew, or a friend, was about to be married . . . one of Elsa's sisters, once. Aunt Minna had a habit of reading to the end of a line, and then translating: she stopped, therefor, at the word "Elsa"—the name and condition of the man the sister was to marry had been given first, and Johann's grunt of half-dissatisfaction was

obliterated in his uncle's completely. Only keen-eyed Owen heard it. The letter went on . . . through the geese and ducks, cows and pigs, births and burials; the only interesting touch was a word about a baby sister of Elsa's named Marianna: *ach!* the prettiest ever, and bright!

"If she is bright," Louis said, "she will leave Wittelshofen before they marry her to a baker's-assistant!"

"In Wittelshofen a girl marries as she is told," Minna reminded him. "Elsa, and her sisters, are pretty, yes, but a bright one, in *that* family, I never heard of before."

John had believed that he should say something that would indirectly praise Elsa: "I can remember the little Marianna, Aunt Minna! A very intelligent child . . . very! Already she could——"

"Could what, Johann?" His aunt counted silently on her fingers as she asked.

"Oh, read—well. And write. And sing . . . like a bird. And——"

Louis could stand no more.

"*Ja!* I bet you she could sing like a bird. A cat, you mean. *Mee-ow!* When you left Wittelshofen the little Marianna was a few months old, maybe!" He rocked with laughter. "Read and write . . . and sing like a bird! *Was fehlt dir, Dummkopf?*"

"It must have been Maria or Anna I thought of . . . or Louisa or Teresa. There are so many girls in the family," John mumbled, while even Owen smiled.

The very dearth of news, the repeated insignificant events, told more than words; you were born, you played a little, you married, you became fleshy. . . .

But, *Donnerwetter noch einmal!* was he growing fat now? Why was he lying here in the grass, instead of playing with the girls? He wanted to dance more, but the contact made him uneasy, faintly afraid of himself. It was an outlet—it made him happy . . . everything made him happy now!

Did it? He got up in the morning, yes, and dressed. There was breakfast. The day's work—or he might saunter out, and over to the brewery, or to the club. . . . There was dinner. . . . Was he becoming a prize hog, fattened with corn for the future?

To-morrow he must see to the books . . . the next day . . . the next day he must do something else. . . .

No wonder he looked at the girls! What else was there for him to do? He had money in the bank, he had an interest in the great brewery, he had a good home, a good friend. . . .

What was it Owen had said? Was Owen, also, beginning to feel cooped, confined, tired of the old scenes? Never until this moment did he consider that he was weary of the full daily life, that there was but one real adventure left in it—why hadn't he seen some one girl who would make him want to stay content? instead of merely wanting . . .

He stood up abruptly.

The band blared, the trumpet-blower performed marvels; the people in the pavilion danced, the men in the beer-garden drank . . . like they had last year, and as they would next!

He brushed his hat off with sudden gesture, as if it bound him, and started from the grounds, along the path that led to the ferry below. The path was a

thrust through dense thickets; it was black, damp from the last rain, odorous, confining; he walked rapidly, his face full of flaming and intense resolution, his feet making no sound in the soft leaf-covered earth.

As he had walked from Wittelshofen.

He remembered that: he remembered Elsa. Well, when he was older, and willing to sit by the fire . . . he might send for Elsa. He should have written her, maybe. True, he always added a word at the end of Aunt Minna's letters, but he had made a promise to her, and—since she was a woman, and he had never heard Aunt Minna read from a letter of her marrying—she would hold him to it. Elsa! There was nothing alluring about her—had he not known her from the time they played as children? Good—when he was really settled . . . when the wanderlust had gone. . . .

Owen needed to get away, too. Owen was so quiet, he said so little: he seemed—*ja!* he seemed worried sometimes, but he never talked of it.

Volatile, he was unable to contain this last thought.

"Owen, *Ich komm'!*" he shouted.

A man and woman, hidden in the thicket, thought him drunk.

4

There was much to do. Uncle Louis called for a family council in the new-furnished parlor.

Aunt Minna was proud of her parlor; it had been remodeled, refurnished but weeks before, and it was the first time that the room had been opened for use. There was a cut-glass chandelier, swathed in brown

muslin and looking like a great withered pearl, between the windows at one end were two twin mirrors in enormous carved gilt frames; the windows themselves, topped with cornices, were hung with crimson brocade; a square piano, very black and shining, stood just before a new oil painting of *The Fisherman's Bride*. Carved rosewood chairs filled every available space. The room had a marble—white, veined with green—fireplace, but it would never be lit. 'A basket of gilded pine-cones filled the orifice. The carpet was covered with roses the sun would never dim; the blinds were never opened more than a quarter.

Uncle Louis planted himself in front of the square piano.

"Well, Johann," he began—ominously, from the use of the German name, and from his standing position—"well, Johann, you say you got to go, but so far you don't say why. Is it a girl, huh?"

It was not a girl.

"I am your friend as well as your uncle, boy. If it is trouble with a girl I say nothing. Have I ever said anything, Johann? Have I ever complained—not that I have anything to object to. But to go off and leave all this comfort—*und für was?* Indians! Ch'ago! Gold! *Pfui!* What you need, Johann, is a wife to take this nonsense out of you!

"I was so once . . . but now . . . now, well, soon I even build me a new house, and I think I get elected alderman. Then I make you a proposition about the store. . . . No? That does not interest you? . . . What do you want, boy?"

John looked at Owen uneasily. What *did* he want?

"Maybe you go out to Ch'cago, Johann, for a while. I got some interests there. You remember the man what was my old *Braumeister*? Well, I give him enough to get started in Ch'cago, maybe you look in at him, sort of, and see what he does. A vacation does you and Owen good."

Instantly John knew he did not want to go to Chicago.

Uncle Louis believed that the two were simply restless, and that a talking-to might knock the silliness out of them. He began:

"What for a business is this, anyhow, Johann? Get the foolishness out of your head. From when have you begun to tell me what you should do? Am I not your father's brother? He wants to go way, *sagt er*! He does not know where he wants to go! From such comes bums, Johann. Owen, you have more sense! Johann, would you be a bum, going here, going there; think of the fellows that come to the bar—they have been all over, but what have they got? A nickel for lager, maybe! Us, we own the brewery it comes out of!"

He paused for breath, but before either of the others might speak, began anew, working himself up to something close to anger.

"Go—go where? He does not know! Ch'cago—he does not want to go there! His money invested—he does not care what becomes of it! Suppose even—which I am not—that I am a thief, a sneak-penny, and rob you on the investments!" John smiled at this impossibility, and his uncle took it as a sign of victory. "Ja, smile! Suppose——" The uncle puffed out his

■

cheeks. He would give Johann an alternative for Chicago, and one the boy would like even less. For why had Johann left Wittelshofen? The army. Good!

"You say you got to go somewhere! Suppose you go in the army, and maybe help our country a little?"

"I . . . no, I don't want that."

Owen also shook his head. There was no money in soldiering.

"No—he does not want to go into the army! I did not want you should go. To Texas our boys are sent, where there are snakes and Indians and Mexicaners and women with gold rings in their noses and wild cows and *Gott weis was alles*. The snakes make you puff up and bust when they sting you and the Indians cut off your ears and noses and the Mexicaners push your eyes in and the women is worse than the wild cows! And the wild cows is worse as the Mexicaners! Well, I offer you Ch'cago and the army—what one you want, boys?" He grinned, certain of the reply, and a bit out of breath.

"Where does the gold come from, that the women wear?" Middleton asked softly.

"Where? In the sand, or on the rocks, for all I know. But let a white man stoop for to pick it up, and then comes an Indian—whoof!—he has no ears left, and no nose to blow!"

John's eyes lit.

"Indians!" he whispered.

"*Gewiss!* Red ones. Blue and yellow also, maybe."

The two young men looked at each other, and Owen's head nodded, although his eyes were blank, expressionless.

"I—I guess we go in the army, Onkel Ludwig!"

Would it not do them good, Louis Meissing told his wife, informing her, after, of what had transpired. He did not say that he had spoken of the army solely to discourage them, or pitch their choice to Chicago. It would be the making of them, he insisted; would bring them back willing to attend to business. He spoke of the whole matter as if it were his own notion and plan. Anyhow, neither Walter nor Andrew Jackson were big enough to fight, and had his family no duty? Had not the Mexicaners sliced up good American soldiers—dragoons, too!—like turnips for a pot? Was it not also a fact, as the newspaper said, that——

Aunt Minna went to examine her boys' socks.

Everything was arranged. They were supplied with money enough to care for an emergency, or to buy extra food and drink. The balance Louis Meissing would invest securely against their return.

John's spirits were infectious. Pouf! the savages and Indians would run into their holes when the army came . . . it was all a romp; the fun Owen and he would have. . . . Even Owen was not proof against John's joyousness; for minutes he was carried away by the notion of escape from routine, although back in his mind was the thought that—in the far country they were going to—there would be gold. Gold he wanted, and must have. It did not accumulate fast enough from sober working.

Louis tramped beside them when they left, his hand in his nephew's. Max was ordered to look after the store and bar but, notwithstanding, Aunt Minna refused to come. . . .

It was almost two years before the Meissings heard from them. From John's letter (Owen scrawled "love to Aunt Minna, you, and the children" on the last page) it was plain that others had been written, but these were never received. The Rio Grande was passed, Vera Cruz finally surrendered, Cerro Gordo crossed none too easily, Chapultepec stormed, Santa Ana broken and in disgrace. . . .

Owen and John, so the letter said, were both well, and had left the homeward bound boat at Vera Cruz. They would write more later. There was apparently money to be made in this new country. There was also much to be seen.

The next letter, years later, was from San Francisco. They were well. Both had grown beards! Owen was a little thinner, but felt fine. It was a wonderful land. Pretty soon they would come to New York for a visit, and bring them some rattles from rattlesnakes' tails! Before that they were going into the mountains after gold. Love to Uncle Louis. Love to Aunt Minna and the children.

Meissing would have written them, had he known where to write.

For one thing, Aunt Minna was dead, and he was lonely.

The investment of their money, also troubled him. There was much of it. At first Louis Meissing had taken chances with their money—so much in a "gamble" for himself, so much for the boys; the trust worried him as it swelled and grew, and he changed most of it to solid bonds or first mortgages . . . and still it grew. Had Owen stopped to figure interest

he would have realized that there was enough to take him back to Wales, but the wiseness, the luckiness, of Meissing's stewardship he could not guess.

After they had been in Corpus Christi for a time, John began to figure upon writing for Elsa to join him . . . to mention girls he had seen at the plaza. Owen knew, then, that soon they would move on. John would shake off his dissatisfaction in roaming; it was natural, Owen believed, for his companion had never seen the girl he really loved. He, himself, had no intention of loving. It had no place in his plans. He was glad, likewise, that they would leave the sleepy Texan-Spanish town; they had been comfortable enough, but the money came slowly, and refused to stay in their pockets.

CHAPTER IV.

I

THEY awoke each morning early, with the full light of day in their eyes. The sky—this morning in '52—was without cloud, as it had been yesterday, and as it would be to-morrow; without cloud, very pale, but glowing orange at the edge; the sun was not yet out of the serried hills.

Their cabin was on a bench of a few acres of level ground overhanging the head of Slug Canyon. From the front window they might pitch a stone two thousand feet down, into the smoke of the cabins of Chipps' Flat. In the rear of the cabin, beneath the bench, the Kanaka Creek (the Hawaiian had been hung for no reason at all from the live-oak beside it) roiled and tumbled. Above them, to eastward, the formidable Sierra buttes, white-streaked in every ravine, a wilderness of jagged peaks and profound canyon depths, of snarling blasts and storms, of mad waters.

But where they were the freshness of the air fanned them deliciously, larks climbed into the sky ecstatically, scores of bullfinches crossed the flat, dipping from bush to bush. Meissing clasped his hands behind his head and looked lazily at this early glory, then stuffed his pipe, lit it, and went to start the fire for breakfast.

Middleton and Meissing had drifted up the Yuba River's middle fork, had mined and prospected up the

stream, pausing to test a bar, a ravine, a promising gulch, until they reached the head of Slug Canyon, where ounce diggings stopped their wanderings and settled them. Shallow placers were soon worked out, but the gold-seekers had found fair reward on the head of this canyon, had discovered gravel following the level bedrock into the mountain. An ancient river, hundreds of feet above Kanaka Creek—a treasure house at whose door they knocked.

The wind was fresh, cold; as Meissing scraped his tin plate free of last night's residue of grease he voiced his doubts:

"Winter's coming, Owen."

The other did not answer. Sierra winter! At their altitude of four thousand feet it meant snow thick over mountain and hollow, an icy hand staying the tumbling water of the creek, hurtling storms driving every wild thing to the shelter of an earth burrow or a migration to the lower, temperate foot-hills.

Middleton knew clearly what was in the other's mind: should they temporarily abandon their find and seek the comfort of winter quarters that Chipps' Flat—or possibly Downieville—afforded? There were tempting distractions in town: hotels where woman-cooked meals might be bought, fandango houses in which Mexican or breed girls for the price of a drink invited companionship in the dance, gorgeous gambling-houses within whose hospitable doors one could flirt with fortune, even a church . . . Meissing would vote for town, that was certain.

In sinew Middleton was not the equal of his friend; he could not lift so heavy a boulder, nor was the stroke

of his pick or the rock of his cradle so effectual, yet he stuck to it with dogged energy, and actually accomplished as much when the day was over. His skill with the rifle kept them supplied with venison, varied by an occasional bear rib; squirrel stews were common: the food was satisfying, after they both learned not to salt the beans before they were well boiled, nor to be too liberal with the saleratus in the dough.

Now Middleton was regulating the heat of the oak coals around the Dutch oven, his costume a woolen shirt and duck overalls.

They had taken a little over two thousand dollars from the shallow gravel deposits; until now Meissing had been vastly content. While it was Middleton that did the hunting, yet the other would tramp the hills, a young pagan rejoicing in vigorous manhood, a healthy, busy young animal. Even Owen shed something of his moroseness, and the two would chatter together at meal-time, over a stew of gray-squirrel, salt pork and potatoes. . . .

Meissing was over six feet in height, big-boned and hard-muscled; in the pair's wanderings for three years, from one worked-out locality to another, few took indignities with him; fewer, because of the grim-eyed, silent Welsh partner. It was inevitable that one be "Dutchy" and the other "Taffy." Panning, rocking, tomming, on bar and ravine, in gulch and canyon, they had made enough to keep going. Slug Canyon was different: here was their bonanza.

Meissing had a perfect argument in favor of a visit to the towns.

The gravel deposits had been exhausted, and in fol-

lowing the rich streak into the mountain they were confronted with what was to them a new phase of mining, and of which they knew nothing. The bank rose abruptly to the top of the bench, a hundred feet, while the bedrock continued on into the hill almost at a level. It was evident that there was but one method by which it could be mined; drifting, or tunneling along the course. Rocking and panning they understood—here was something they must learn.

They were not the first to encounter these old channels. There were "upper leads" along old channels elsewhere—at Chipps' Flat, Kanaka Creek, Jackassville, along and across the middle fork of the Rio Las Uvas—the Yuba River. The two men began by cutting and digging, into the hill, and before they pierced ten feet the yield of Slug Canyon was dwarfed. The bottom layer of gravel was rich; along the bedrock and in its crevices and irregularities nuggets were imbedded and scattered, coarse gold that turned the scale to the half-ounce, ounce, five ounces; on one day's work Meissing had unearthed a beauty as big as his huge fist, white rock seamed with gold, which when broken up yielded almost six hundred dollars.

Then came trouble. They had trusted to the solidity of the gravel; it gave way and the ground caved to the end of the excavation.

Meissing's point could not be refuted.

They must learn to timber, cap, lag and breast.

The terms they knew, but that was all. Middleton refused to go down to the towns; he would, instead, prepare poles and logs for timbering the drifts and bracing the tunnel.

"Not only that, Owen," Meissing reminded, "we must have more food. And tobacco. Winter comes. We must be warm."

Middleton nodded agreement.

"Suppose you send a couple of big boys up," he said. "We've got to have a better cabin. This won't do, in the storms."

"Yes. I'll do that. What kind of tobacco you want?"

"I don't care. Just tobacco."

They pondered over a list. Flour, buckwheat, corn meal; sides of bacon and a small barrel of pork, chili beans and rice; canned oysters and dried apples for Sundays, coffee, tea . . . paregoric and essence of ginger, quinine, court-plaster . . .

Meissing was very quiet during the day. His friend, knew what obsessed him: the other was glad to move, to get where he could find warmth and laughter, glad to see something different.

"When do you go?" Owen questioned that night.

"In the morning, yes?"

Middleton nodded.

2

The October air had grown chill; the soft south wind had a sharp stimulating tang that conveyed a sense of close, impending change; in the morning a white frost blanched the brittle yellow grasses and a flurry of snow whitened the hills and left patches where the sun failed to reach. Leaves circled and sailed in the breeze, and dropped in ellipses into the hollows.

Meissing sent several men up Slug Canyon; pine logs

were felled, squared and mortised at the joints; a stiff adobe mixed with pine-needles chinked the interstices and was plastered over the boulders that built up the chimneys. In a rough enclosure close by dry wood was stored, a crude forge erected. A bin was made in which to store flour against the poaching of the wood-rat. Middleton even had the caved dirt removed, the cut widened and the skies buttressed with timbers, making a covered approach that would keep out the snow. . . .

Still Meissing did not return.

The workmen left. Alone, Middleton puttered about unnecessary tasks, dragging them out beyond their useless need. He could stand it no longer, finally, and dug out their caché, filled his buckskin purse with dust, and started toward Chipps' Flat. His path led through manzanita thickets of red and green, powdered white at the top, over granite-ribbed slopes; he wondered if they were the foundations of the world worn through to the surface.

The town of Chipps' Flat had but one street—Main Street; cross-streets were impossible, as the place clung to a mountainside: there was the hotel, the express office, four merchandise stores as a dead center, and extended away on both sides saloons, and gambling-houses for keno, rondo, and more aristocratic—and costly—faro and monte: business was slack on weekdays, but, when Middleton got in, Saturday night at six, a thousand miners from the overhanging hills were roaring good-naturedly in.

Middleton left his pack behind the hotel counter, and set out for the Silver Dollar.

The place reeked with patchouli and stale whisky. From every table came the popping of corks, from every dark corner enough evil was brewed to stake a section in hell. Doctors, lawyers; deacons, in churches back home in Ohio, rowed like bullies for the kisses of the breed girls. God froze in their attics, while the devil grinned in the bay-window.

The men were millionaires. If they spent what they had—get more. It was a cinch. A bulge on fortune, they had. One per cent. might keep their stakes.

Smoke swirled about the hanging lamps with their green covers, smoke eddied over the long bar and sent tendrils into the case-goods on the shelves; it made entering Middleton blink, and his eyes water and smart.

He went straight to the bar.

"Where's Meissing—Dutchy?" he asked.

The bartender shrugged a shoulder.

"Saw him with French Henriette," he said. "What you drinkin'?"

"Anything . . . where'd you see him?"

"Oh, around," vaguely.

"Been in here?"

"Huh? He mostly has. Comes in 'bout nine, an' dances."

Middleton drank.

"Change some of this for 'slugs' "—local markers of fifty dollars—"and keep the rest till I want it," he asked, dropping his buckskin bag on the bar. The bartender nodded, and swept the purse to him, measured enough gold to warrant passing out a number of slugs, and stuck the rest into his safe.

"Look worried," he offered. "Dutchy a care, kind of? Have one on th' house——"

Middleton nodded, and drank again.

"Hey!" some one roared at him. "Come over, feller. We need one more. Feller's passed out on us——"

"Sorry," Owen said. "Waiting for a friend."

"Do yer waitin' here, then, an' make you some money!"

Why not? Middleton played cold poker. He might not win, but he would not lose very much. Wait he must, and it would be better if John saw him actually engaged rather than simply awaiting him. He nodded, and joined the three at the table. The former fourth was lifted from his chair, and left to sleep on the floor near by.

Instantly he regretted his decision to play.

It was due to Hawkins, one of the players—the one who had asked him in. At best of times the fellow was cross-grained, domineering; he spoke of those that had bothered him and were "running yet," of shooting scrapes and knife-work: the two playing with him seemed men of peace, impressionable, and awed by the wire-edged temper of Hawkins. Pot after pot he bluffed them out of.

On Middleton, however, his system refused to work. The Welshman's face was expressionless. He played what he had for what it was worth.

Hawkins had been drinking; by the time Middleton sat in the game he was dead-ripe for a fight. The game started with a two-bit limit; soon there was none but the roof. A bottle passed; the two other men broke

fairly even, but Middleton added steadily to his pile of chips, while Hawkins lost.

The two men seemed to buck each other continually. Time after time they would raise and raise each other, until Hawkins would call, and always Owen had the cards. It was exasperating, maddening, especially so since Hawkins himself was called with a pair of sevens . . . the very fiend of ill-luck seemed in him, and, as the game proceeded, he grew flushed and excited. He cursed audibly, vehemently; he always had good cards, but always somehow the other managed to top him. He became explosively angry and abusive. Middleton offered to quit, but Hawkins would not hear of it. The Welshman wished that Meissing would come, and give him legitimate reason for stopping . . . he wondered where John was, and what he was doing.

"Come on, you Taffy," Hawkins shouted. "Don't sneak it. Give me a chance for my money!"

So they sat down again, and another hand was dealt. Middleton called for one card, but Hawkins did not draw. Then the betting began; after the second round the others dropped out, and the two were left. Hawkins seemed to have grown very calm; Middleton was cool, his face a perfect mask. They started to boost each other.

Tens, twenties, fifties: Middleton called to the bartender for more money; the other brought it, without waiting to see if there was enough in the buckskin purse to pay for it.

The room became still, you could hear a Mex girl draw breath. The bartender stood by the table, watching. Sweat stood out on Hawkins' forehead, although

the Welshman was cold. The jackpot held four hundred dollars. Then Hawkins could stand it no longer. "I'll bet you a thousand! A cold thousand!" he cried.

Middleton nodded.

"I raise the same," he said, after seeing the bet.

Hawkins stared at him, then at the cards, as if he would tear their backs apart and glimpse the spots upon their faces. Every minute he licked his lips.

A hand touched Middleton's shoulder; he slid the cards carefully together, one by one, held them close to his chest, and glanced quickly upward.

"Hello, John," he said, and turned gravely to the table again.

"Let me see!" Meissing said, worried at the sight of so much gold on the table. "Let me look at what you got, Owen."

Middleton shook his head.

The town "professional," who had come over and was watching the "big hand," even if the house had no percentage worth mentioning in it, nodded agreement at that; Meissing's expression might have been read, and Hawkins bet accordingly. The professional made a queer figure in the place; frock-coat, low-cut vest, neat-fitting trousers, tight high heel boots, and his terra-cotta Peruvian sombrero.

"I'll sort of watch," he stated, like an augury.

In some way the news seeped through the doors of the Silver Dollar: not that the game was an unusually big one, but Hawkins was being put to that place where he must "put up or shut up." If he was the ragin' wolf he claimed he was, well, he was on th' prairie and they'd see what he would do!

The Silver Dollar filled up. Miners, gamblers, greasers, dance-girls, merchants: the story had spread, and it was rumored that Taffy Middleton, from the camp up Slug Canyon, was making things hot for Hawkins. The air became fetid, horrible. . . .

Hawkins was glaring at his opponent, who, also, was for the first time vaguely uneasy. How much had his partner been bled of? For the card game he had cared but little, had played each hand mechanically for what it was worth. Now, he realized that—if he lost—they might be broke; he looked at Hawkins, wondering what the man would do.

"Another thousand," Hawkins whispered.

"Is the mine worth two more, Joe?" Middleton asked the bartender, certain of the answer. The man nodded.

"See you, and raise you one," Middleton said soberly.

Then Hawkins could stand it no longer.

"See you!" he cried.

Triumphantly he laid down a straight.

"There!" he snarled. "Beat that, you stinkin' hill-grubber."

There was a perceptible pause. Behind Middleton a space opened, as if position there might become dangerous. Only Meissing stood his ground, and at his side the girl he had entered with. Meissing moved from foot to foot, but his partner, called, showed no visible shade of emotion. He dropped his cards face upward, and there arose a roar of incredulous surprise. The straight Hawkins had shown was eight-high, that of Middleton ten.

Hawkins stood up, lungingly, livid with passion.

"You cheatin', crooked swine," he yelled. "You dirty tin-horn!"

He struck across the table, and brought blood from Middleton's lips. Meissing jumped forward, but his friend held him back; into his eyes there came a look of cold and deadly fury, but he merely scooped up the money and stood erect.

"Meet me at the hotel, Jack," he said, and, not stopping to see if his partner would follow, brushed through the crowd, and left the saloon.

The bartender grinned, and said to the professional, "Some luck!"

"Luck, hell," Hawkins shouted. "Don't tell me it's luck! He's a dirty thief. But I'll get even. He's got to fight. He'll fight with guns, and then you can lay him out and give th' minister somethin' to do to earn his salary."

Meissing blinked.

"First you kill me, no?" he said.

His great arms hung loosely, and he looked vastly more formidable than the thin Welshman.

"You mind your own business, Dutchy!"

"I do. Owen's is mine. Here, you Hawkins: you bother Owen, and I take you apart and see where all the whisky you drink goes, *verstehst?*"

Hawkins found the eyes on him unbearable. He knew what they were thinking—that he had let the "Taffy" get away with something, and had not retaliated. He lifted the bottle, and drank in great gulps, fanning himself into an ungovernable rage and fury. The Welshman would not fight, the damn' rat . . . suddenly he jumped to his feet, and before he could

be stopped battered his way through the saloon, with a gun in his hand, the onlookers in a pack at his heels.

His lips foamed. A hundred feet he ran, and then caught up to Middleton, swung him around:

"Stand an' fight, you tin-horn, you crook, you Welsh bastard," he screamed, and slapped the other's face with his left hand.

With a bellow of rage Meissing was on him. In some strange way the dance-hall girl, French Henriette, kept beside him; he grasped Hawkins' striking-arm as between a vise. In that same instant Middleton waited. The other's taunt struck him dumb, actionless, from all it *might* mean——

Then Hawkins cut loose, took quick aim, fired, and a red spot stained Middleton's shirt, near the shoulder; had French Henriette not shoved at the hand as it came down and deflected the gun's muzzle upward, it would have taken Middleton square in the heart.

Hawkins squirmed in Meissing's grip, striving wildly to turn, fire into the close body, and release himself from the murderous, tightening embrace that rocked his spine; so quickly that the safety-seeking, gabbling throng never knew just what happened, or in what order, Middleton raised his arm, and his gun spat twice.

He did not aim, but, trusting to his hunting-acquired skill, fired: Hawkins had been contorting wildly, madly, and the first shot missed him, although French Henriette, by a little sigh, gave token that the bullet was not spent; the second went straight enough. . . .

Middleton turned. "I didn't want to do it, boys," he said. "You can see he drove me to it. I'm sorry."

'And sat incongruously on the board sidewalk of Chipps' Flat's one street.

Hawkins lay in a huddled jerking heap, dead.

3

'Chipps' Flat went about its business. Saturday night went on, with no other excitement save when Old Man Parsons fell off the back porch of the Elite and broke a leg on the rocks a hundred feet below; it was a quiet night, even considering Hawkins. Sunday was better. The oldest inhabitant could not remember when the minister'd ever done better—he made ever' one 'v 'em cry, he did, being thus given credit that rightfully was John Barleycorn's, who made the tears easy to get at. It was not a bad Sunday—the funeral made a feller wish that Chipps' Flat had a few more killin's in it, like Hepsidam or Port Wine, where there was always somethin' doin'.

“Here is where H. Hawkins is,
A moral lesson to never miss.”

—so the wooden board declaimed. The jury, called on the spot, decided that Hawkins had died from interfering with the course of a bullet, and the inquest was so attested to: what could any one want more? It was all legal, as good as a Sacramento judge could do. The feller was dead (Old Man Parsons said); was th' camp t' be a' undertakin' an' mournin' parlor a whole week?

They were expectant of a second funeral, for it was rumored that the woman, French Henriette, would probably die also; every one hoped that she would last through the week, so the affair might be pulled off on the coming Sunday.

French Henriette—there was a name to conjure with!

Middleton had stood up a moment after he had been shocked from his feet, and now walked a little unsteadily behind Meissing, who carried the woman down the sidewalk—all before Hawkins' dead hands had ceased making five-pointed tracks in the dirt.

The two spoke in whispers as they walked, then Middleton hurried his pace, despite his throbbing shoulder, and came to his friend's side.

"How long you been spending money on her?" he asked.

"Never saw her till yesterday. She came in from 'Frisco. Didn't even know her name was French Henriette. Madame told me. Don't think the girl knew it was that, either. Dam' funny, Owen. Anyhow, we been going around a little. Not much."

"Where you going now?"

"Madame's. That's where she lives." Silence. Then: "How's things."

"All ready."

"We go back to-morrow?"

Middleton nodded.

He was constrained to look at the girl in his partner's arms. With her closed eyes she seemed very young, and singularly tired; her hair was very pale, and shot with its own color, her neck a fragile stalk,

culminating in a flower-face. The whole affair worried Middleton; he was indignant, angry, with himself, for having struck her, and mingled with this a sense of irritation that he should have been elected to oversee the matter—being responsible—swept over him; yet in justice, he knew that the woman's striking of Hawkins' arm upward had saved his life, or at least a more dangerous wound.

"As far as I know . . . she was a good woman," Meissing said suddenly.

Owen nodded again.

They did not speak more on the short walk to Madame's.

When they reached the one-story house Owen rapped at the door; it opened a little and Madame's face appeared.

"She's hurt," Meissing said. "Not bad."

Madame's eyes narrowed and stabbed them both. Her face grew impotent with anger, and she stuttered:

"A fine business! A new girl spoiled! Now I got to feed her, an' doctor her . . . a fine business! Money out—and none in yet!"

"We'll pay," Owen said briefly. "It was my fault."

Like a flash her expression changed. With a dirty jeweled hand she smoothed her tousled hair, her coarse teeth showed in a gold-capped smile. There was molasses in her tone.

"I guess we can fix it up," she agreed. "Now, how much do you think would——"

The girl opened her eyes, and gave proof that she was conscious.

"Nothing," she said weakly.

Madame's voice contracted to a venomous intensity: "Who's runnin' this?" she demanded. "You shut your mouth!"

Meissing still held her, his blue eyes blinking. The girl moved, and he set her down on the hall's one bench. She swayed against the wall, bit her lip, but kept her gray eyes open wide.

"Better put her to bed," Owen suggested. "Then we'll talk—business. The girl's hurt, you know."

Nausea staggered the girl, and all restraint seemed washed away: she gasped, and whispered intensely, "Don't . . . leave me here! Not with—this vile woman!"

"Vile woman! Vile woman! You, you to call *me* a vile woman, that's been jined three times in holy wedlock. . . why, you whelp of sin . . . you miner's—" she topped it with an oath.

"We better go," Owen said hastily. "No place for us, Jack." He refused to look at the girl.

"I . . . I guess so . . . we better go," Meissing repeated after him.

Middleton reached for the gold he had swept off the table in the Silver Dollar.

"We'll give you five hundred," he decided. "Half for you—if you leave the girl alone!—and half for her! Her half I'll leave with the boys at the Silver Dollar. She can get it when she wants. Come, Owen!"

"No!" the girl whispered huskily. "No!"

"Not enough?" harshly.

"Not enough!" Madame bellowed. She had intended asking for two hundred all told. "Not near! What

with a doctor from Downieville, and lots of my care, and food . . . an' the girl idle for a week——”

French Henriette shivered.

“Idle for a week, an' me payin' her way up here! Chasin' with Dutchy here, an' not a check from the saloons—nor anythin' else!—to show for it! What you think this is, girl? A home for tired act'rines? You get some sense, an' behave! Now, I says——”

Middleton seized his companion's sleeve.

“Let's get out,” he said. To Madame: “I'll show up to-morrow. Then we can talk payment. You know who I am. The girl's been shot. She's out of her head, possibly. To-morrow morning. Come, Jack.”

He stalked out of the house, Meissing following. His shoulder no longer pained him, it was merely numb and uncomfortable. The two did not speak, but after they had gone a few hundred paces Owen stopped abruptly.

“I'm a fool to put it off,” he said. “We want to get out to-morrow. I only touched the girl in the arm. It hardly even bled. They'll hatch up some scheme to skin us, Jack. I'm going back, and get it over with.”

“Funny about that girl, Owen. I—I never so much as touched her. And you know how they gen'rally hang to a man. She seemed dazed, kind of.”

Middleton started to answer, but said nothing. He, also, was doubtful; the offer he had made was fair—more than fair; and more than the Madame had expected. The girl was not incapacitated; she would be perfectly all right as soon as the shock wore off. When she had said “no” to his suggestion of half the money to herself she had known what she was doing. Funny

—as Owen said. That was it, funny. He did not understand it.

4

“You little brat! if you open your face to him——”

The voice was the Madame’s, and the words, hissed in a queer screaming whisper, arrested the returned men in the lower hall. They had entered noiselessly.

Then a dull pounding, and again the Madame: “Open th’ door, you fool! Let me in! Play up with me, honey, an’ we’ll get a nice thousand out of them! You will, won’t you, darlin’?”

Faintly: “No.”

“You will! You will!—And unlock that door!—Where d’you get that dam’ mule spirit from?” Then, wheedling again: “Honest, Henriette, I kind of thought you was lyin’ when you said you was a good girl. For all of me be as good as you want . . . only be reasonable! If you can get money from th’ drunks ’thout comin’ across, that’s up to you! But—you—let—these boys pay up, as they should! Half to me an’ half to you, dearie. Ain’t that fair? Ain’t it now?”

“No. I won’t.”

Madame’s voice lifted.

“So . . . stubborn girl . . . well, some place I get paid for this! What you think if I tell some of th’ boys that they got a chance to have a good girl? What if I do that? What you think I get? More than these few dollars, I promise you . . . now, will you?”

No answer.

“If we say a word, she’ll spit in our faces,” Owen whispered. “Let’s get out, and wait over a day, Jack.”

"Did you—believe what—the girl said?"

Middleton shrugged his shoulders.

"What has that to do with it?" he said cynically.

5

The next afternoon the two men were in the Silver Dollar; the place was quiet, a slow game went on in a corner, but most of the men stood about, wondering if the stage would make it through the snow. Even bets on the time "she" would arrive were small, and laid without real interest. As evening came on the saloon livened up; girls drifted in. . . .

True, there was an undercurrent of whispering, that Middleton and Meissing could not miss; one fellow even hinted to John that he had been the biggest fool that ever hoofed it into Chipps' Flat, to have passed up the chance he had been given! A good girl in Chipps' Flat—good, but, as Madame had said it about, perfectly willing to learn. There had been a pretty amount of bidding, the fellow went on; nobody actually knew who had greased Madame's palm the most, but the story was that the big fellow from Nigger Tent had the inside, and the longest purse.

"She must be willing, all right," Owen muttered, when they were by themselves a moment.

"Maybe it is that she owes Madame for the trip up, Owen. Though she said nothing of it to me. All she told me was that she thought she was going to dance here. By herself, you know. On a stage."

"What's the difference?"

"None, I guess. Owen, if you had not been hurt——"

"It's nothing."

"If you had not been hurt, I would have called this a perfect time! I danced, I drank, I forgot the lonely hills. I have to *do* things, Owen, or I get strange inside of me. Like a young boy. Me, a bearded man! It is . . . ssh! . . ."

From the size of the man, it must have been the "big fellow."

Henriette, her fingers touching his arm, seemed very white, but bore no other trace of the previous day's excitement. The big man's face was indescribable; it was at once wildly elated and a bit doubtful; he was not certain of his bargain, and the price had been high—a record even for Chipps' Flat.

Owen stood up immediately, and crossed to where the pair stood. He had the money counted.

"Here is the amount I spoke of," he said, and proffered it.

The big man—Keene, of Nigger Tent—glared at the little Welshman.

"She's paid for," he said. "Get out of th' way. I settled with Madame already."

Owen's words never came easily.

"A minute," he said. "Just a minute. This is about something—something before you——"

Keene took it that Middleton was about to express a prior lien, to contest his purchase.

"Out of my way!" he roared.

Before Owen could move, had he been so minded, Keene swung, and the smaller man went down. The

pain in his shoulder throbbed suddenly, but he came blindly to his feet, passionate and angry, ready to throw himself on the tower of muscle before him, when Meissing pinioned him from behind.

"Easy, *lieber* Owen . . . easy," Meissing said. "You can not this big brute fight." To Keene: "*Was ist denn das?* Shame! To strike a man so much smaller . . . a man but yesterday wounded!"

For days, weeks, before Meissing had left their hill-mine he had been fighting a dim intangible foe, his own desires, his lonesomeness; the smoldering fire always in his eyes brightened, his mouth became grim, stern, a straight line. Here was something definite, human.

"Think shame!" he blurted.

Keene flashed at him a look, measuring him from head to boots. This, Keene knew, was the man who had been running with the woman he had just paid for! Had, he wondered, had Madame told the truth? Doubt assailed him, and drove him mad.

Middleton stood steadily enough now, with John's arm about him firmly. He, on his part, had but one desire; to complete the bargain with the girl, get out of Chipps' Flat without further argument, and back to the gold in the hills. The girl must be paid. He did not see clearly what had angered the big fellow from Nigger Tent, unless . . .

Unless, it came to him in a flash, unless the girl, with his money in hand, would repay Madame, for the fare that had brought her to Chipps' Flat; he looked at the girl, and believed that her eyes were mutely pleading. He thought sneeringly that she might do with the

money what she wished, but he was going to pay it, no matter what Keene thought or said—or acted.

"This money—" he began, but Keene snarled him silent.

His face darkened, and he tried anew: "Let us talk this over. It has nothing to do with——"

"The girl?" Keene snapped.

"It has to do with her, yes, but——"

Keene was sick of talking.

"Out of my way!" he snapped again. He grasped the girl's arm; she had been standing beside him, silent, large-eyed; cowed, frightened, and by no means herself. Her motions, her very silence, seemed automatic.

Middleton did not move.

The big man gathered himself, and as he did so Meissing shoved his companion behind him.

"First—you talk with Owen!" he ordered.

"What are you buttin' in for, Dutchman? You had your chance with th' girl! This ain't your scrap! If your pardner wants any arg'ment, I'll argue him!" A fist waved in circles, menacingly.

"No," John agreed. "It ain't my argument. But I bet I make it mine! So!" He swept his hand across the other's cheek. "Now, py chiminey, if you got to be a brute, be one with me! When I get done, you listen to Owen, I bet you!"

With one tiger-rush Keene threw himself forward, struck right and left with ponderous mighty swings, but, for all his size, Meissing was too swift for him; twice he ducked, and hopped out of reach before Keene could recover. The big man from Nigger Tent almost lost balance from his terrific misses. When he swung

around a circle had already been formed in the Silver Dollar, and there was Meissing, watchful, grinning, awaiting his next attack.

Keene's face grew fiendish in its sinister wrath; he shot forth a curse, and once more hurled himself resistlessly forward. Dextrously, Meissing moved his bulk aside, ducked, dodged, side-stepped; again Keene found every blow wide and short. Some one in the crowd jeered—"Two to one on Dutchy!"—flatly, like the twang of a banjo.

The Nigger Tent man glared; the jeer goaded him doubly, because of the woman somewhere in the crowd. His woman . . . that he was going to take! He rushed again, his powerful arms winnowing the air, and still Meissing grinned at him, unscathed.

Now Keene slowed his rushes, his blows were better timed, his fierce jabs more shrewdly delivered; now they were closer, one brushed Meissing's hair as he ducked from it. Keene was heaving and panting, but his opponent's breath came easily, if fast; then, like a spark of light, the two came together in a clinch. Keene's eyes dilated with anticipation; he had Meissing in his huge arms; he could crush him in a mighty hug, the hug of a grizzly. Meissing did not move away, nor try to evade him; he used the old-country trick of pinioning Keene by the elbows so that he was helpless.

For a moment he held him so, then, suddenly releasing his arms, danced away.

"Stand up and fight!" Keene roared. Meissing nodded coolly, the smile left his lips, and he settled down to business.

He approached Keene with little caution, and the other believed that at last Meissing was going to mix it: he gave a bellow of rage and charged, smashed his heavy right for Meissing's face; Meissing sidestepped, the blow missed. The heretofore-retreating John shifted his feet, and brought his left, full-weight, on Keene's mouth.

At that triumphant blow there was the first bright blood-gleam, and the crowd thrilled, yelping, packlike, its excitement. Keene hurled himself at the other, his arms flailing; any one of the blows, delivered in a vital spot, meant the end of the fight. . . .

Meissing's knuckles bled, several of Keene's teeth had been loosened, and he spat blood.

Meissing was excited now. He had stopped smiling, and, with the first blow of Keene's on him—a glancing, ineffectual affair—he began to writhe at the lips. His phlegm was gone, his good nature was gone; this time he rushed the other, and there was a furious mix-up, a whirling storm of savage, murderous blows. They came to a clinch, a rough, brutal hug, and Meissing broke away with difficulty.

The Silver Dollar roared its delight. Meissing's shirt had been ripped from him; in the last infighting Keene's face had been battered until it was a blood-mask.

Middleton all this while was pale as death. His friend was fighting *his* fight . . .

Meissing was insensible to pain. He went after his man grimly, mad with battle . . . suddenly Keene seized him, and tried to whip him to the floor. For the

first time there was a positive opposition of the two men's strength. They swayed, swerved, muscles creaked, faces became distorted with effort, one gave, the other gave . . . Meissing began to bear Keene backward. With a mighty heave Keene broke away.

This enraged Meissing the greater, and he tore after him; they locked again . . . Keene went into the air, from that embrace, straight up, and was hurled to the floor with sickening force. He lay there, his eyes closed.

The professional, Chipps' Flat's straight gambler, stooped, put his ear down, and grinned:

"He's all right. But I guess the fight is over. You win, Dutchy."

"Now, Owen—you pay the girl, yes?" Meissing grunted, his chest still heaving. "Then we get from this place. But"—breathing deeply—"I feel very fine, Owen!"

Middleton searched a moment, and found the girl on the outskirts of the throng. A way was made for him.

"Here is the money," he said shortly.

The girl's hands fluttered to her breast.

"I . . . I can not," she breathed.

"Then I'll give it to the house to keep for you. Good-by."

A frock-coated man accosted Owen.

"You can't," he objected. "You know the rules. Fighting don't go, Middleton. We got to have some law. You know the rule. First come, first served. Even if Dutchy licked him, it's the Nigger Tent fel-

low's girl. You know the rule. It's the same anywhere—Port Wine, or Downieville, or anywhere. You——”

“I was simply——” Owen began, when the look in the girl's eyes stopped him. Of course, he knew the rule. That had nothing to do with it. He knew, also, now that the fling was over, that John did not want her; that, some day, his friend would send for the girl over the seas. . . . What had he, Owen Middleton, to do with all this?

He looked at the girl again.

Who had helped him when he had been in trouble? None. If he had been pale before he was ghastly now.

“Give her the money, Owen,” Meissing said. “I got to get another woolen shirt. I guess I get a new one. That big clown”—thumbing at Keene, now on his feet shakily—“that *dummer Kerl* has ruined mine forever. It's over, anyhow. Give her the money.”

“No,” Owen muttered hoarsely.

He could not move his glance from the girl's pitifully astounded face. It was as white, as bloodless, as his own; he wondered vaguely if the thoughts in her head were as turbulent, as troubled, as unanswerable, as those that distressed him so.

“Listen!” Middleton said in a queer voice, then continued steadily, although the words were low, husky:

“Listen! You men know—what Madame said about—this woman. This—girl. I intended telling—the Nigger Tent man . . . I was going to—give this girl . . . God! can not you fools understand? Can you—not see? Have you—no eyes? Is she—what she is not? I tell you”—his voice raising reedily—“I tell you

that—that—that this girl is going to—to—marry . . . me.”

It was out. All the turbulence in his brain. He would have called it back; he must unsay those words. He was an idiot. The fool he called the others. He was crazy. Would John never shut his mouth? Yes, he was crazy. If it had been John, now . . . but why was he, Owen Middleton, acting so? Yet the girl had stopped a bullet from his gun; more, she had actually preserved his worthless life. What of that? Suppose, his seething head said, suppose John really desired this woman? Good: he could have her. *He* didn't want her! It might be arranged later. But—if John didn't, what then? He must unsay the words. Instead, he said to the girl:

“You are, you know.”

French Henriette (to use Madame's name for her) had neither yes nor no, nor, when the whooping self-appointed “committee” summoned the minister did she reply to the preacher's “Do you, Henriette—” save to whisper, “Not Henriette. Mary.” Her face was blank, immobile, dazed, expressionless; once, later, she smiled wanly when all of Chipps' Flat—except Old Man Parsons, cursing his luck in bed—crowded the sidewalk and roared a farewell as the new wife, Owen her husband, and Meissing started for the hills. . . .

Before they were out of sight the town crowded back into the Silver Dollar and Mike's Place and the Eureka for a final toast; before they were out of ear-shot they could hear, clearly in the frosty air:

“Here you are! S'lect yer pardners, boys! Just a'go'in' t' begin! A nice juicy waltz, boys. Here y'

are f'r nice glossy floors an' nice flossy girls! Swing yer honeys! Swing yer honeys! Come on, boys!"

It was crisp, cold, but the new wife was securely bundled against the weather; there was nothing in the sharpness of the air to make her shiver.

CHAPTER V.

I

THE cabin above Kanaka Creek was cold and deserted-looking when they came to it that night. Save for Meissing's singing the walk had been made in silence; Meissing, however, was in excellent spirits, and roared out:

*"Du, du liegst mir im Herzen,
Du, du liegst mir im Sinn"*

and other old German songs with great gusto. He it was, also, who dragged a backlog into the cavernous fireplace, banked it with resinous pine knots and oak limbs, soon to send bright cherry-colored flames leaping, while the crackling sparks coruscated and exploded in miniature fireworks. He sang loudly as he prepared supper, stopping after every verse or two to bellow: "*Wie geht's*, Owen?" and was none the whit distressed that the other did not answer him.

The cabin had two rooms; the large one in which they lived, and a smaller one in which were two bunks. When the girl that had been known as French Henriette and now was Mary Middleton entered the room, she had done it as she had everything else, mechanically. She had gone to the crude bench before the fireplace, made soft with skins and animals Owen had shot and

Meissing cured, had sat without even removing her coat. When the flames leaped and roared she hugged the coat closer instead of dropping it. Her eyes wandered to the next room, with its two bunks, and moved as blankly back to the fire again. She seemed motivated by nothing, interested in nothing and caring for nothing. An automaton. Wheels and springs.

Supper was soon over. The girl did not eat, but drank a tin cup of steaming black coffee. Meissing lighted his pipe, examined the man and woman, scratched his head perplexedly, and then suddenly grinned.

"Well," he remarked, "little Johann is very tired. He has had a big day, even for him. I guess Johann takes a few blankets and sleeps by the fire. To-morrow I make another bunk in here, or maybe another room."

Neither Owen nor the girl gave sign that they heard.

Meissing yawned ostentatiously. He rubbed his eyes with his big fist.

Silence.

He stood up and stretched.

"I go and get me some blankets," he offered.

"Bring—some for—me," Owen ordered. Then, to the woman: "You—will have—either bunk—in the other room."

She did not seem to hear; as Meissing returned with an armful of blankets—and an open mouth—Middleton rose to his feet, walked over to the girl, picked her up, and carried her into the next room. She made no effort to resist him, nor did she give any tangible sign, save that her cheeks became chalk-white, where they had been only pale before. Owen set her

down gently on the edge of one of the bunks, muttered, "Good night," and left her, closing the ill-hung door softly behind him.

John divided the blankets into two parts. Seeing his companion moody, he said nothing, but removed his boots, and rolled his blankets carefully about him. The fire hissed and sputtered. It was a half-hour before Owen lay down for sleep.

"*Allmächtiger Gott!*" he heard Meissing say over and over, shaking his head as if the whole matter were too much for him.

Owen watched the fire long . . . at last the red coals before the backlog began to assume strange shapes, to whirl at last into blackness: he slept.

2

The two men had but a vague idea of the problem before them, yet they attacked the face of the hillside with confidence; all that they actually knew John had discovered from men in Chipps' Flat. It was a slow and awkward performance, and the results of each day's labor seemed pitifully small for the amount of toil expended.

Once, centuries past, a stream had curved through the channel which they were opening, a tributary to a mighty river that had been blotted out by a volcanic overflow. The long-extinguished craters of the Sierra had vomited torrents of mud and liquid lava, choking every channel, and covering the hills and valleys with a blanket of fine clay. The waters of the running rivers dried up from the heat of the fires that lighted

the mountain-peaks, the molten flood swept down from the crests and buried beneath the overflow the ancient channels, and for ages the beds remained, the rounded boulders, pebbles, sands distributed as when the water rippled over them.

In the lapse of years, the old organic remains, leaves, driftwood, vegetation, decayed and united with iron and many minerals, cementing the gravel into a mass as hard as rock. In the gradual erosion of the quartz veins that seamed the granite, the gold had sifted, rolled and had been ground into particles scattered through the gravels, securely locked under the hills.

It was weary toil, breaking into this treasure-chest. The cemented gravels resisted the blow of pick and crowbar. The two friends were carrying forward a tunnel six feet in height and about five wide at first, but soon discovered they must raise it a foot, to get pick-swinging room. At best a foot a day was the limit. Yet the gravel for two feet above the bedrock paid them nearly a dollar to the pan, and in the crevices of underlying granite, nuggets and coarse gold were packed away profusely. They had struck it rich—richer than they had even hoped for.

The channel gravel was mixed with boulders of white quartz from six inches to two feet in diameter, which had to be wheeled out; they had disposed of them by walling up both sides of the open cut and beyond with these rocks, building up a solid wall two feet thick and four high. These were muddy and clay-stained. In the middle of the day, when the sun was out, water dripped from the scant melting snow overhead, and fell upon the wall.

It was over a week since the two had returned to the camp, bringing Mary with them. The new wife had been distrait, unnaturally quiet, but had slowly grown accustomed to camp-life. With Meissing as instructor she had learned to cook with their rough utensils; Owen had never heard her, but his companion knew that, when the men were at work, she sometimes sang softly in the house. He did not speak of it to Owen. Let him find it out for himself.

Man and wife rarely spoke, although that between them was nothing like enmity; "please" or "thank you," "yes" and "no"—little more.

Owen carefully avoided looking at her; she never surprised him glancing toward her, for he never did.

They were coming out of their tunnel to eat. Mid-day. Owen remarked the contrast between the muddy rock and the spot where the glassy white quartz had been revealed when the dripping snow had washed the adhering clay away.

"Pretty," Meissing said, and looked again.

It was an idle, purposeless gaze, yet it was suddenly fixed by what seemed to be a splash of glittering yellow. The dropping water had exposed a clear surface of a hand's breadth, and through it ran a two-inch streak of solid gold.

"Well?" Owen said. "Let's get chow."

"Owen . . . I get a bucket water!"

He rushed for it wildly, madly, returned, and cleaned away a larger space, exposing six inches more of the metal in the vein of the rock, and a half-dozen smaller and interesting streaks; cleaned until all of the rock not imbedded in the newly-made wall was brought to

view. Splashes, streaks, veins of gold in every direction: more gold than quartz.

The two looked at each other, fascinated; then, with quick breath, began to dig the rock from the surrounding ones. It was almost virgin gold.

Doubt, incredulity, the joy of discovery, swept over Meissing's face. Even Owen was moved; his whole attitude changed, he seemed boyish, out of himself. Meissing let out a roar of giant laughter and jumped into the air; they joined hands and hopped wildly about the dislodged rock of quartz-and-gold. . . .

They had to tell some one! They had to shriek it into the air . . . they must shout "Gold! Gold!" as if they had never seen any before. With one accord they stooped and lifted the rock together, and rushed to the cabin, yelling as before.

They stood it on the table, still whooping; together, chattering, they showed Mary the veins, estimated the size, gloated over the beauty. They could not eat; the woman was carried away also and laughed, spoke rapidly and gaily.

It must be weighed.

"It is the papa of them all!" Meissing insisted. "Never was there such gold all in one rock!"

"We might chip the gold into pieces small enough to weigh on the gold-scales," Owen suggested. The scales took five ounces.

"No," Mary said. "Spoil that lovely rock? No—isn't there some other way?"

"Sure, sure. I get the two benches, and put a piece of iron between. A crow-bar goes across the iron. Then we have a balance, and we weigh it!"

They sprang into action.

The benches were dragged into the middle of the room, the iron-piece placed across it, the crow-bar wired loosely to the cross-piece to keep it from slipping. Then the nugget was slung to one end of the bar and a hundred-pound sack of flour to the other. The flour was heavier, but a ten-pound can of coffee restored equilibrium: the nugget weighed about ninety pounds.

"Now I get another rock!" John yelled, and, before he was finished speaking, rushed out, to return with a rock about the same size as the nugget. With this they replaced the nugget. It took a fifty-pound sack of beans to overbalance the barren boulder, and four full four-ounce cans of baking-powder added to the boulder brought a balance.

"So—we have it!" Meissing said. "The nugget weighs ninety pounds, about. The rock with no gold, which is the same size nearly, weighs forty-one. Good! Our gold-rock weighs close to forty-nine pounds. . . . Owen, Mary, we have almost ten thousand dollars! Ten thousand dollars out of the hills! All before our eyes! Ours! Owens's and mine . . . and yours, Mary!"

"Ours!" Middleton echoed. "John's and Mary's and mine!"

Then John yelped a second time: "*Wir sind verrückt!* We are crazy! A schoolboy could do better. Was I *Einjähriger* for nothing? Is there no difference between Troy and avoirdupois? Are there not four more ounces to the pound? Are twenty-five hundred dollars to be thrown away, because I am a fool?"

"Ours!" Owen cried again, and even Mary echoed it softly: "Ours!"

It was difficult to work for a day after that. The gravel showed no sign of falling off in value, but the giant nugget dwarfed everything else. For the time, they had dug a hole in the middle of the main room, and deposited it there.

In January they were storm-bound for the first time. Masses of dark weighty clouds floated heavily in from the south, a screaming wind came over the mountains, the valley was filled with flying snow; for days the flakes drifted down, completely filled the air so they could not even see the tunnel. Big banks and drifts piled where tree-trunks barred the rushing wind. The cabin was buried ten feet deep, almost out of sight, and the way to the tunnel blocked completely.

At first the men talked together, while Mary used the needle and scissors belonging to their kits; then they unearthed a deck of cards; then they talked. Unknowingly, Mary was drawn more and more into their conversation, their plans; unwittingly, they would include her in these plans. After the third day John mentioned Elsa. He wondered if she was married. In Wittelshofen a girl married early, and had a dozen—that is, big families were very common. Elsa, now, was probably married. Even her sisters were surely married, even to Marianna, the youngest. . . . Marianna had been a fresh kid, now, if the letters from home had told the truth. Cute, too. Maybe she wasn't married. Yes, sir, some day he was going to write back to Wittelshofen, and get him a wife, too.

"Linsen-soup, Owen, better than even Aunt Minna made! Those girls can cook——"

"I like Mary's rice-pudding pretty well," Owen objected, and the girl flashed him a grateful look.

"Me, too," John hastened to say. "And those canned oysters we had Sunday!"

Of Louis Meissing and New York they spoke also. John was glad that they had left. He would have had (he said) a front on him bigger than the Emporium at Downieville—but look at him now! He stood up, and patted his barrel-chest and lean belly with approval.

"I make a good husband some day," he said complacently.

"When are you going to send for your sweetheart?" Mary asked idly.

"He's been sending for her ever since 'forty-four," Owen laughed. "I feel sorry for his sweetheart."

The woman looked at him quizzically.

"*Ja!* Since 'forty-four. But, Owen, I got an idea. I go down to 'Frisco pretty soon for a visit. I write for Elsa—or maybe Anna or the young one, Marianna—a Maria they had, and an Anna, so they called the little one both names!—then I get married, and have a house . . . some day."

After the storm their work went on; beyond cutting a path to the drift and shoveling away the crushing weight on the roof, there was nothing to stop them. Fresh meat was no longer a part of their larder, but once Owen shot a whirring grouse that had broken through the ice crust from its nest under a log and sought food in the tree-tops; this was the only actual privation.

Meissing used to sing, in his deep baritone:

“I live on swine, ’til I grunt and squeal,
And no one knows how bad I feel——
She left her lousy miner
In search of shining gold”

until the plates rattled. The “m” in “miner” he drawled, to obliterate the previous word, out of consideration for Mary.

In the bitter cold, the house was comfortable, it was weather-tight and always warm. There were a few books: Meissing had included them in the stuff he had sent up to the camp from Chipps’ Flat; *The Mysteries of the Court of London*—eight volumes, of which three were missing, a work dealing with George IV with all detail; a Cruikshank-illustrated Dickens’ *Pickwick Papers*, a story then new; a creepy story called *The Monk* and other yellow-backed affairs—*Dick Turpin* and *Black Bess*, *Sixteen-String Jack*; candle on the floor, the two men would read after Mary had gone to her room for the long night.

Below them they could see the swirling smoke from the buried houses in the town, and it gave them a sense of utter isolation.

Meissing made a pair of rough snow-shoes, and used them skilfully. He was becoming uneasy again; restless; the quiet nights bothered him at last. He no longer sang as he smashed the pick downward. At night he spoke often of town, or of San Francisco. He even wrote and addressed a letter to Wittelshofen, and carried it ostentatiously in his heavy coat-pocket.

3

Owen had not forgotten Wales. He had sufficient to take him back now; sufficient to make a "lord" of him, a great personage. He had not postponed the date of his going. Of course he was going back, and confound them . . . the best solicitor and pleader in London, in the whole Empire! was none too good for him. Mary he could take to San Francisco, and leave John to manage the mine. In the spring, he knew, they must get men in to work, so the job of smashing through the hill progressed more rapidly; John could see to that. Then he'd come back, he guessed . . . he liked the hills, the giant trees; he loved the fragrant ferns. . . .

He had his money! Now, he'd show them who he was! A sense of power dominated him.

Mary—she would be glad to be left, with plenty of money to do as she wished.

"Going to snow again, Jack," he said, as they washed for supper.

Meissing nodded. "*Ja!*" Then, "Snow . . . work . . . snow! *Donnerwetter*, Owen! Have we enough . . . sugar?"

Middleton knew what was coming.

"Plenty."

"*Ja*. Plenty. Hmm . . . I think I take the snow-shoes and go to town, Owen. I see have we mail there."

"Mail? Who from?"

"Well—we might get a letter from Uncle Louis."

"He knows where we are?"

"*Nein*. But we *might* get a letter from—somebody!"

Middleton laughed.

"Work! Work! For what, Owen? Have we not enough? I . . . work! work! . . . I . . . I go to . . . to mail the letter to Wittelshofen!"

Owen laughed again.

"You see!"

He did not even stop to eat, but, with a wave of his hand, started toward town, after slipping his shoes through the thongs of the snow-shoes and rolling a small pack of clean clothes.

Owen was full of it when he went into the cabin.

"Wanderlust again," he called to Mary. "Jack couldn't stand it any longer. Just as well. Two or three days of something different, and he'll be content all winter here."

"He isn't coming back—to-night?"

Owen's smile was erased.

"No," he said. "He isn't coming back to-night."

They ate in silence, and without a word Owen went back to his pick and crowbar and shovel.

When he would come to the outer edge of the drift with rock for the dump, he could see high scudding clouds traveling fast from south to north; presage of snow. Fiercely, he kept any thought of Mary—his wife—from entering his head; he battered on the wall before him as if it were contending with him, as if it might strike back venomously; he kept any thought from entering . . . why could he not think of something else? Some one else? and worked the faster, close to exhaustion, for he never stopped.

What difference did it make, this night? What if John were gone? To a woman, yes, but to him, no; it was all the same. They would be the same people, would act the same way. . . .

He worked until it was too dark to see, and finally was forced to give over; his feet dragged as he approached down the snow-cut to where streaks of light showed in the cabin.

Supper was as silent as the midday meal. Owen kept his eyes upon the plate before him. Only when the table was cleared, and Mary on the bench near the fire did he raise them; strange, he thought, how the fire gleamed in her hair. Was she frightened of him, he wondered? He would—he must—reassure her. Tell her that this night was no different from any other, even with John gone; say to her that she was—just the cook! that was it; just the cook!

“Mary,” he said.

“Yes?”

“Mary——” how should he put it? What came next?

He mustn’t blare it out; he must sort of talk first. He must be politic. He began again:

“I . . . I’m Welsh, Mary——” and stopped.

She nodded, and the movement of her head seemed to strike him silent. The girl looked at him squarely; how bright her eyes were! as shining as the hair! He had never noticed that before . . . yes, he had . . . but not . . . as he did now.

“Don’t be—afraid of me!” he blurted.

“I’m not,” she said steadily. “And—I have never

said—how glad—how very . . . how good you have been to me. To marry——”

“I shouldn’t have,” he said, and was silent.

The girl dropped her sewing.

“I know,” she whispered. “It was—foolish. ‘A girl who—like me——’”

“Not that,” he told her. “Not that. Nothing about you. About me! Me!” Suddenly his grinness fell from him, and he stood up, approaching her. He looked very young; and began to speak rapidly, the unbottled words stumbling out: of Wales, of himself, of all that had happened.

“You!” he concluded. “Think of me! Me—what I am! What they said I was—I must be! You! Think of me!”

“Think of something else,” Mary retorted softly. “Think of what—I might have been!”

He did not hear her.

“John speaks of being lonesome,” he said harshly. “John doesn’t know what—I am! He thinks *he’s* lonesome! Lonesome! God!”

He went back to his bench in silence.

Involuntarily, his eyes would seek her face; it was averted from him, offering nothing but the curve of her cheek that was flushed, illumined, possibly, by the fire’s light: a bright color stained it clear to the shining hair. He wondered what she thought.

He lighted his black pipe again, the Virginia tobacco balling in his unsteady fingers as he stuffed the bowl.

Wind snatched at the branches of the trees, shaking them free of snow that fell earthward with a soft

thud; wind roared up the valley, wailed eerily in the pines. Gaunt trees creaked and cracked as they gave to the blasts, but in the cabin it was warm, sheltered, apart from the world below. Jack would be in town now, full of whisky and song: why hadn't he, Owen, gone along? The girl would have been safe enough alone, and lord knew what Jack . . .

His eyes went back to her bright flushed cheeks, her hair, the poise of her head. Strange, he thought, that no sense of dominating, of taking this woman filled him; that was as it should have been, from all he'd ever heard. He didn't love her: the very idea was silly. Yet it made him queerly happy to see her in this warm silent cabin, to see her comfortable, protected, safe . . . a funny way to feel about a woman! If Jack told the story of the two rooms—how the boys would laugh! But, even drunk, Jack wouldn't. He was vaguely glad that things had been as they were, glad for the stored gold and the cached nugget, for the warm cabin . . . what bright hair she had!

She seemed sensate of his glances, laid down her sewing, and stood very erect.

"Good night, Owen," she said, and went into the cabin's other room.

His pipe went out repeatedly. How unafraid of him she was . . . how very unafraid. . . . And how bright her hair!

He took his blankets from their shelf, and dropped them before the fire.

"Owen!"

He did not answer. He could not call, "What is it,

Mary?" His throat seemed tight, constricted. He walked slowly, with heavy feet, to the door, and pushed it open.

Mary held her shining, unbound hair from her face with a trembling hand.

"Owen . . . don't be lonesome . . . husband!" she whispered.

4

In the clear air John's voice carried far:

"I mailed the letter, Owen!" he roared, as he returned.

Full of his own strange happiness, Middleton called back, "Fine, Jack!" Mary came out of the cabin, watching Meissing shuffle over the crust of the snow.

"Fine!" the other bellowed, floundering forward as rapidly as he could. "Fine? Now I am fixed good and plenty. I mailed it the day the stage left. Know you what was in the letter, Owen? I said to send Elsa to 'Frisco, or Anna, or Louisa, or Marianna—and then I could not get the letter back! I was drunk when I gave it to the express-office man, and while I was still drunk the stage came and took it!" He was close to them now. "A fine business! Fixed, I tell you! I—*Donnerwetter*—what has happened while I left!"

He looked from man to woman, then let out a greater yell than his first: "Something good has come of my going. Owen, Owen, this is *aber wunderbar!* You lucky fellow! Ho! Ho! Now the two wanderers are both married! Both caught! Ho! Ho! Ho! I take what they send me from Wittelshofen gladly now! We

get us families, and be papas. I call mine Owen, and you call yours John—or maybe I have a Mary, and you . . . hmm! a fine business . . . Louisa or Elsa, or Marianna or Maria. . . .”

Alternately they worked or loafed in the cabin; winter wore itself out in a southeaster that melted the snows magically, and every ravine became a brawling torrent, the rivers mad water; sluices and flumes were swept away; then warm sun. The foot-hills donned their spangles of buttercups and poppies, black-oaks put forth tender leaves of green piped with yellow, humming quail paired off and sought the mountain-side.

The winter's work was represented in a pile of gravel, awaiting the “long tom” and washing; men were brought in, at fabulous prices, from Chipps' Flat and Downieville. It took them three days to raise a bunk- and cook-house, and seven more to lay a sluice, with riffles; Owen and John argued against the new contraption, but, on hearing that it was used with success, agreed. It trebled the “long tom's” work, and each night's clean-up dazzled the two partners—nearly a prospect-pan brimful of coarse, rounded gold, from the size of mustard-seed to several ounces. They lost miners; men wandered off, hunting diggings for themselves, or willing to use the pan or rockers . . . searching for richer fields.

Their camp, their mine, was off the trails; visitors came seldom or never. Saturdays the men would drift down to Chipps' Flat, and return on Monday red-eyed and haggard, announcing that “it weren't worth it, nohow”—and go the next Saturday again. They

would bring back what news there was: an oyster-and-champagne supper at the Golden State, a new law—if a man owed you money, you got one cut at him with a switch for every dollar he owed you; you could “take it out of his hide,” fellow named Cannan up to Downieville had been stabbed by a Mex woman, and they hung her up by the sluice-head—shouldn’t hang a woman!—somebody was riffling the sluices over at Windy City and Jackassville, but they hadn’t got him—yet. ’Frisco was getting civilized—more church societies now than members of the “Hounds” . . . news. . . .

The Silver Dollar had enlarged, and embraced a hotel also—made it convenient when the boys “passed out”; it was as fine as any joint up at Downieville; crimson calico curtains, a parlor with a mirror, a fourteen-foot sofa, two rocking-chairs, a straw carpet: it cost eight thousand dollars, and was the pride of the camp.

The hills filled with cabins; the whole region was noisy with activity—dams, wing-dams, flumes, artificial ditches; the easy surface diggin’s were going, and it took labor to find gold. . . .

News: a woman died in Chipps’ Flat; the only pall that could be found was the cover of a monte table. Murieta, that astute greaser, with his mustang-mounted cohorts, was somewhere in the hills. . . .

Scraps drifted into the camp, tattle of this or that. The work went on steadily, even John seemed satisfied, content. One of the miners was made a sort of foreman; when he was found steady, satisfactory, the two partners decided to take their gold to town, and de-

posit it with Wells Fargo, or ship it to the U. S. Assay Office in San Francisco. Enlarged tales—like that of the rumored presence of Murieta, which never came to anything—were always troubling them, isolated as they were, and knowing that attacks were always made at night, or when the men were at work and scattered.

They loaded two mules with the gold-sacks, and John, Owen and Mary went into Chipps' Flat.

The formality of weighing the gold and obtaining a receipt took a quarter of an hour, then the clerk said:

"Got a letter for you, Dutchy," and gave it to him.

John looked speechlessly to Owen. Then he said, "You—you open it, Owen," when he saw from the stamp, the angular writing, that it was from Wittels-hofen.

Owen opened it.

"I can't read it," he said, laughing. "It must be in German."

Meissing took the letter. He held it away from him a moment, recreasing it to the original size of the envelope, then spread it out and read rapidly, mouthing the written words; looked up at Owen, something akin to terror in his eyes.

"By next boat she comes," he said. "By Panama. Then to 'Frisco. I must have put all that in the letter I wrote home. And I sent money for the voyage. I must have been awful drunk, Owen. I . . . I guess I got to meet her! I got to—unless"—pleadingly—"unless you bring her here for me, Owen?"

"You did it—you get her," Owen grinned. "Shouldn't he, Mary?"

"Of course! It's his place."

"*Ja!* I guess I got to. Maybe she speaks nothing but German . . . I got to, all right. But I come back quick, I bet you, Owen!"

Owen nodded.

"Which one is coming?" he said slyly.

Meissing smiled feebly as he answered, "Marianna. All the others were married."

BOOK TWO
EASTWARD

CHAPTER I

I

STEAM Beer—Cold and Sharp—V¢—Free Hot Lunch; only at noon on steamer-days did the drivers of the trucks that rumbled down San Francisco's East Street urge their four horses past those enticing signs. From the Apollo, six blocks north of Market, clear down and past the Mail Dock, the signs beckoned to the thirsty and hungry. The Apollo, then a Greek restaurant; Jerry's, then a ship-chandler's; Mickey Peterson's, and next to it a second-hand shop with a waiter's uniform, a peajacket, a checked suit flapping outside and dusty knives, revolvers, near-gold rings with bright glass stones, binoculars, watches to be seen through the dirty window—then The Nugget . . . clear to Harrison Street, below the dock where the *China* would sail at one.

Trucks clattered their way over the cobbles with late cargo, and as they neared the Mail Dock, where the *China* lay, their drivers became vituperative; where did he think he was goin', th' son'v a Swede?—lay off, you Mick, or——

True, there was a rule that no cargo was taken after eight in the morning; but it was like other rules, and made to be broken.

Passengers, friends, relatives, were shoved this way and that to escape the trucks on the dock itself; last-

minute trunks were missing, and hand-bags must be hovered over to prevent stealing; every one who could crowded about the end of the gangplank and made entry well-nigh impossible. A steward and his two assistants clung to the stanchion of the rope-guard, willing to be of service, but given no opportunity.

Twelve-fifty-five; the gong sounded on board, an officer called, "All ashore . . . all ashore. . . ."

Relatives, friends, husbands or wives, fathers and mothers, trooped down the gangplank, most of them crying, even to the men, and making no effort to restrain their feelings—why should they?

Twelve-fifty-nine; the gangplank was loosened at either end, dockhands were ready to cast off the great manilla warping-ropes, the *China* hooted long, warning blasts, belated visitors scurried down the wabbling plank. One o'clock. Shouts. A space between the ship's black side and the dock itself, with viscous, litter-filled water below . . . a rush down the dock to the open end by all the people there . . . handkerchiefs waving . . . cries . . . send me a post-card of Fuji! . . . all aboard for number nine! . . . write at Honolulu . . . be good till I get back! . . . good-by . . . good-by. . . .

The *China* in the stream . . . blurred faces, indeterminate figures . . . there he is! . . . I see her! . . . no, she wore a blue dress and that's black . . . then an emptying wharf, silent and still.

Here and there, at the end of the pier, a thousand feet into the bay, a few sorrowful groups remained, watching the boat, although they could no longer seek out a loved familiar face.

The eighteenth of March, 1889, sailing day of the *China*, bound for Honolulu, Nagasaki, Yokohama, Shanghai. . . .

The *China* backed, stopped, seemed to hesitate as if contemplating return, then swung, listing, and straightened out, crossing the course of the Oakland ferry-boats with a bellow of her siren, her sparred and rigged masts swooped about by seagulls, her funnels vomiting black smoke.

Two people stood on the edge of the Mail Dock, watching; a tall, unbent man in his seventies, gray and gray-bearded, and his younger, unwrinkled wife: Johann and Marianna Meissing, watching their two boys—Karl, whom everyone called Charley, and Owen—watching their two sons leave for the Orient. Minnie, their daughter, named for Aunt Minna, had already gone into the cavernous dock to find the carriage to take them all home.

“Good boys . . . good boys,” Meissing said slowly. “Good boys, *Mutter!*”

She took his hand, nodded and watched the *China* slip down the bay.

2

When John Meissing, of Slug Canyon, near Chipps’ Flat, had come to meet his arriving bride, Marianna, thirty-odd years ago, the wharf upon which they now stood so securely had been beyond even the mudflats, a good half-mile from shore; where Marianna landed—the Long Wharf—was now busy Commercial Street; mudflats had been filled in, sand-hills leveled, the old *Niantic* burned, the *Niantic* House erected on the site

of this ship which had been dragged ashore and made a rooming-house; the Niantic House, and every gilt mirror, had been torn down to make way for a larger brick building (when the laborers excavated into the sand they found the ribs of the old ship, and a case of Jacquesson fils champagne still corked); the Hounds, Terry, the Vigilantes, the Modocs, were names only; the filibusters had no longer reason for their profession; the South had seceded and acceded; the Baldwin Hotel and Baldwin Theater blazed nightly until one o'clock and then the Olympia and Thalia dance-halls took up the task.

Along with the tide Meissing had moved; his hand had been on the rope that drew a cannon from the Sea Bird to defend the prison; his ear had listened to those who explained that "law and order" could not be obtained by backing the "law"; he had been a Vigilante. . . .

Ja! Ja! he would often say to his sons; those were great days, and they would listen eagerly.

Marianna had been sick when she arrived at San Francisco. It was more an illness of the mind; not even the rough journey across the isthmus had disturbed the wiry determined girl, who, alone among her nubile sisters, had been eager, willing, to answer the call of a man none of them remembered well save Elsa, and this eldest sister frightened the two other unmarried ones with the old tale of Johann Meissing's turbulence. It was Elsa's place to go, but Elsa would not go. Even the life of an old maid, in Wittelshofen, was preferable to wild Indians as neighbors, to cows with horns longer than their tails, to snakes such as

one read of in the Bible, but poisonous, moreover, even to their breath! The next, Louisa, had an affair pending with the son of the hide-dealer, who had received a legacy, mark you, of nearly three hundred *Gulden* from his uncle's wife in Holland—was Louisa to give *that* up to live with a man who did nothing save fight, and who never even wrote home? What sort of a life would it be for a woman: if children came, who would see them into the world, to say nothing of confirmation later? While Louisa entered her arguments, Marianna, youngest of the sisters, wriggled impatiently in her seat; she had, ultimately, no need of words, for the matter was decided for her.

The money for the journey was with the letter; some one must go. If Elsa would not, and Louisa felt that she had the hide-dealer's son well in hand (and the *Gulden* almost pocketed), what more simple but that Marianna go? Should they permit another family to get the offer, and work off an old maid—and then boast of it? Never! Besides, Marianna gave no sign of becoming plump, and who would want a wife built like the cross-piece of a hen-roost? Marianna in a daze heard herself being coaxed to go. . . . When she was left alone finally, after agreeing, she did a little dance of joy. What did her sisters want? A lovely journey, with money enough to travel *Erste Klasse* (not that she would spend it so foolishly, but it was nice to think she might, if she cared to!), to that strange part of America called *Californien*, and then to become the wife of the only man in Wittelshofen who had ever stood up to an army officer—did not the old bearded general still say that only once had Wit-

telshofen bred a man?—what more could any woman want? Was it worse to go in marriage to a man one had never seen than to be told that on such-and-such a day one must marry a townsman one hated?

To her own *Ausstattung* was added bits of Elsa's; a lace collar, two hand-woven linen tablecloths and thirty napkins, sheets that had been their mother's (already frail and yellow at the edge), petticoats from thin wool to that measurably thick; night-gowns with long sleeves and necks cut almost to the chin . . . all definite proof that Elsa formally gave up hope of marriage.

She wondered if Johann Meissing would appreciate the lace shawl that Aunt Regina added to the collection: "*Ach!*" Elsa drawled bitterly. "What does he care, so long as he has a woman? Did he not once say . . . he would send for me. . . ."

"He has sent," Marianna said in a small voice, fearful of a change at this last minute.

"He was going to Neu-York, to live with Uncle Ludwig," Elsa snapped. "*There*, I would have gone to him. He . . . he was a lovely boy, Marianna! But to the Indian-country . . . you are crazy to go to him, child. *Ganz verrückt!* Before he left, after he had fought . . . he kissed me, Marianna." She bit her lip, mumbling, "Why could he not have remained in a city?"

Marianna looked at her sister, strangely moved.

"You go," she whispered. "You go, Elsa."

"No . . . I would be afraid. . . ."

"He will protect me—you—from the Indians, Elsa."

The other pressed a tense hand against her breast.

"I am not afraid . . . of Indians, fool," she muttered.

Nor, after that, would the tight-lipped eldest sister assist in any of the preparations. Only at the last moment, with Marianna ready to leave, after a huge family-dinner, did Elsa unbend; then she swept the girl to her in a fierce embrace that shook every one of Marianna's four petticoats, and whispered, "Be happy, little sister! Do not be lonesome, for I shall be thinking of you, always."

Marianna could not understand the sudden, almost harsh, affection.

Not until she was on the Pacific did doubt assail her. As the ship neared San Francisco, it was as if the mysterious Johann Meissing enveloped her with an influence from which she could not extricate herself; there were actually hours in which she felt afraid of him. She felt that his thoughts must be concentrated upon her, and the thoughts burned. They assassinated calm. What should she do when this man claimed her? How must she act? And—at last—why, oh, why had she come?

She felt humiliated, and about to suffer added humiliation.

All of the happiness, the adventure, was gone.

In her tiny cabin, she began to cry, and soon her crying became violent; afraid lest some of her ship-mates should hear her, she pressed her hands over her face and sank down on the bed. She cried, thoughtless of everything save the coming fearsome trouble, cried a long while, lying there on the bed, with her face pressed against her hands, and her hands pressed against the pillow; at last she ceased

from crying. Suppose she *was* going as a wife to a man she had never seen; was that worse than going to some one she disliked, or hated? But—what if she hated Johann?

There came to her, in some queer way, that this Johann Meissing was of different breed from the people of Wittelshofen, and, even if she feared, or hated, him, that his—their—children would have a strong new land in which to grow. Until this moment the question of children had never been considered. In Wittelshofen it was never considered; it simply happened.

The very sun to westward seemed new, strong; it did not flood her with life and virility, but rather gave her a strange lassitude that frightened her. This she tried to understand, but the thinking of it wearied her. As the journey's ending was in sight, and passengers began to line the rail for the first glimpse of the gap that proclaimed the Gate, she became ill with sheer nervousness. . . .

Before more than a half-dozen men had leaped to the wharf, a great bearded man shouldered his way aboard; before Marianna actually recognized the hooked Meissing nose, she heard the exclamations of the women about her; as the man stood on deck, bewildered and peering about, she, braver at that moment than himself, called evenly:

"Johann! Johann Meissing!"

Her heart thumped as he came swiftly toward her. Yet she saw, keenly, that while the swing of his body was assured, his hands opened and shut, and his eyes were already watching every expression of her own.

He came before her, coughed once, twice, and then whispered hoarsely:

"They . . . wear . . . the same clothes . . . as when I left."

"*Ich verstehe nicht Englisch,*" Marianna whispered back. Then, in the same German, "I . . . am afraid, Johann Meissing! Be good to me. Good to me." They stood looking each at the other, and then Marianna laughed brokenly. "I will be expensive, Johann Meissing. My clothes—see—they are not the same as other women in *Amerika* have. But—we did not know. I . . . I will work hard and make a different sort. I have brought . . . materials . . . but even so I will cost you much money, Johann."

He threw back his head, laughing; "You shall have more clothes of the new kind than any woman in Wittelshofen dreamed of, little Marianna. And a woman to make them for you! *Ja! Ja!* little Marianna, the baby, was the only one brave enough to come. The letter said that they were all married save you, but that, I think, is not true. And you were not afraid to come across the two seas. That is the kind of woman——

"Tell me, Marianna, were you never afraid?"

"Never," she said. "Never . . . until . . ."

"Some one told you of Indians? Or snakes?"

Softly: "No."

"That is the story they always tell, about wild things! If not that, then what? If red Indians did not make you afraid——" he broke off, and after a moment added, "So! I should have known what it was. I am a fool."

They stood silently, until Marianna lifted brave eyes to his, and said frankly, "I—am not afraid—now that I have seen you, Johann."

Nor, as she looked into his honest eyes, was she.

The return trip to the mine was postponed . . . a month . . . a second month . . . a third. . . .

Middleton wrote shortly that all was well—to take his time. The partner in the hills sent a full half of each month's diggings—and each became smaller and smaller. Meissing bought a produce business: that was something that people always needed, wheat, flour, potatoes, beans of every kind—white, navy, black-eye, pink; the sign over the store read "Middleton and Meissing," but none had ever seen the Middleton.

After every remittance arrived Meissing would say, "Next week I go up to Chipps' Flat . . . next week I go!"

Weeks, months—and then Minnie, the eldest.

"Now I go—and bring back Owen and Mary!" Meissing said, gleeful. He actually bought passage to Sacramento on one of the river-boats, and had his bag ready, when a letter came from Mary.

"Owen said to mail you a check on Wells Fargo for eighty dollars," it read. The check was enclosed. "He was not very sick, dear John, before he died. And he has been very happy, except for one thing. As the mine began to give out, he said that it was wise to buy real estate. Much of his money is invested in Chipps' Flat, and some in Downieville. But it is strange, the towns get smaller and smaller. He was worried about that, right up to the day he left us.

Much of the land is empty. I think Owen purchased it as an investment, but it brings nothing. The prices were high when he bought, but they are not so high now. Poor Owen—it troubled him. You see, dear John, Owen died before he knew—I know women should not write such things, and it would be considered indelicate in your city—that I am going to have a baby. I hope that it will be a boy, and I pray that it will be a boy. I am going to Sacramento soon, and live there for a time—until——

“It is lonely here, with Owen gone. The mine is empty now, and I am all alone——”

“*Gott!*” Meissing shouted, and threw the letter down, the rest unread. “Always I was going, and I never went! *Gott!* What sort of man am I? Selfish! Like a lord I live, and Owen sick in the hills. Owen—dead! My dear friend, my brother Owen. . . .” His face became suffused, he balled the letter in his hands fiercely and flung it into the grate, where, on the cannel-coal, it ignited immediately. “*Gott!* Owen—dead!”

Marianna was practical.

“His wife—we go for her, Johann! We bring her here with us, *nein?*”

“We bring her! Marianna—my coat! My hat! Drop that baby and bring them! My hat, Marianna! Owen dead!”

“Did it say—in the letter—where she is?”

“*Ja!* In Sacramento. Where is my hat?”

“Sacramento is large. Perhaps she gave where she lives——”

Meissing glanced at the fire, and bit his lip.

"In Sacramento," he said shortly. "I find her. It is enough. If she were any place in California, I find her. My hat and coat, Marianna! Must I . . . there, *Mutter*, I am excited . . . Owen dead!"

He did not find her, and, four days later, returned home sadly. Every hospital, every rooming-house, every hotel—but no Mary.

What he did not know, and never knew, was that Mary had given birth to a boy, to be called John Middleton, in a shack on the edge of the road into the state capital, where the stage-driver, frightened, had left her with the farmer's wife; that John Middleton—eight pounds and lusty—was in the world, and with his coming the mother was gone. . . .

He never gave up the search. What he had was Owen's wife's. After a trip to New York, where Onkel Ludwig's sons turned over the trust-fund, he redoubled his efforts; he never gave over, and never found a trace of Mary or what might have happened to her. At Christmas, he would always raise his glass, and say, "To those who are not here!"

Marianna was frugal. Because bread might be bought in a store, made where one could not see it, and probably kneaded on a dirty board, was that any reason why she should not continue making her own? What, she asked John, would she do with her day if she were not busy? Of equal importance was the fact that the children were fond of the warm sweet loaves, and, on baking-days, brought a crowd of neighborhood-children for a piece of mother's bread-and-sugar. Yet, for all her generosity, she did not spoil the children: Minnie went dinnerless to bed on more than one

occasion because she would not eat the soup, and consequently could have nothing which followed; if it had been watery soup, Marianna remarked, she would say nothing about it, but good lentil soup, upon which slices of sausage floated, or barley-broth, or chicken-soup with dumplings; children who did not take soup never grew to be big and strong! Her own mother had told her that! (Dinner over, Karl would climb up-stairs with hidden tidbits for Minnie—all of which Marianna knew, and said nothing.)

Toward the children her attitude was strange: she thought them more than perfect, and yet corrected them far more than John; if Karl performed at the dinner table, with Owen's assistance, the father would laugh, and the noise increase with every chiding of John, until Marianna would say simply, "*Genug!*" and they would stop. Only Owen ever dissented, and that principally at the time when he wailed in anguish that he was tired of wearing Karl's pants or papa's made over to fit him . . . and he *wouldn't* go out with Minnie's repaired jacket, even if the fancy buttons *were* taken off! John Meissing said that Marianna made everything the children wore except the shoes, and that some day he would bring the tools and leather, and then she could make those, also.

Marianna wanted nothing of the accumulating money. It was for "the children," for their learning; they must head their classes as their father had done. Minnie came close to doing this, Karl would try for a day or so until he forgot, but Owen . . . "That Owen," Marianna would wail, "every other week his teacher sends for me. Owen does this—

Owen does that; always something! *Ich fürchte mich*, Johann, about our Owen! He is not a bad boy. He is . . . like yourself."

"I will speak to Owen," her husband would say. Then eyes twinkling, "I will give him a proper spanking, Marianna."

"Now, Johann——"

"Well, *next* time I will spank him, yes?"

The nearest to punishment Owen ever came was going without dessert.

The produce business did well; Meissing took as partner a distant relative of Marianna's named Phillips, for there was too much for one man to oversee, and the boys, Charley and Owen, were still in school.

In the meantime the Meissings had built a home, but soon found that it was being encroached by shops, and was no longer in the residential district; they moved out "into the country"—the sand-hills of California Street, near Buchanan; others joined them, building similar long narrow wooden houses, steep-staired and corinthian-columned at the entrance. The Meissings' house was the old one, from Polk Street, on a new brick foundation, and rooms added to it. There was the iron-fence, behind which were a row of calla lilies, steep stairs leading to a small front porch, with heliotrope on the incline; a long front hall and a back hall; out of the front hall opened the front parlor and the back parlor: the back hall led up-stairs and to two rooms, one the dining-room, the other without name but used for extending the dining-table when there was company; this unnamed room had shabby furniture and a slippery sofa (down which the children

slid) and in it the family lived. Callers, when they came formally, were kept in the front parlor, a place of formidable polish and discomfort, hostile carved and tuft-upholstered chairs stood precisely, the grand piano (on which Minnie and Charley played duets—*The Lion's Farewell* and *The Retreat*) catercornered the inner wall; the back parlor was for ordinary company, and more comfortable; in it was the old Polk-Street "parlor furniture." The kitchen was large, and had a pass-closet into the dining-room.

The front parlor! the ceiling Minnie had frescoed with cupids and blushing clouds against a cobalt sky . . . there was nothing in it that the boys' fingers might safely handle, not even the enticing Swiss Yodeler of china on the piano. . . .

Up-stairs were the bedrooms: "mother's-and-father's" the largest, smaller ones for the children, a spare room (where the sewing-machine was kept), the bathroom, a bleak little chamber called the "girl's room": any one who owned such a house was classified as Rich.

The California Street cable-cars ran past the front; as they passed one another the gripmen signaled with the rope-rung bells—clang-clang, clang-clang.

Meissing kept most of his money in the bank. It was necessary to pay for most incoming shipments—beans from the valley, for example—in cash, or sight draft against bill-of-lading. When cash was paid, the merchants did not know, until the barges were actually at the wharf, what was arriving, what they might use, and what it would cost. Meissing and his partner, Phillips, both drew on this as necessary.

Marianna was younger than her husband, and better able to bear the next shock.

The bank balance was gone, and with it Phillips. Meissing searched, but never found him; he did discover that most of the money had gone over the green-topped tables. Meissing did not want the fellow caught and then brought ignominiously back to San Francisco—was he not a relative of his?—it was not to be thought of. He would have liked what money was left, if he might have caught up with Phillips. Marianna was more bitter; not because of the vanished gold, but because of the lines the affair brought to her man's face.

"It was like you, Johann," she said. "You were good to him, and in return he . . . *ach!* is it for this you have worked so hard? When you took him as partner, he had nothing. And now . . . we have nothing."

"*Mutter . . . liebe* Marianna, I am sorry that you——"

"I? It is you, Johann!" Her head went high. "For me, I have all any woman could have. If I feel sorrow, it is for you. But you and I—we go ahead as we have before. If there is not meat every day, we shall remember that in Wittelshofen there was meat but once a week! If I have cried about it all, I shall cry never again. No one shall say that your wife is not as brave as you, *mein Lieber!*"

It gave him new courage, and courage that he needed badly.

With his working capital gone, Meissing found that his produce business was not so good, not so profitable.

At five in the morning, when the neighbors, still in bed, might not see, Marianna was on the long wooden front steps, bucket and brush in hand. It was not that she herself felt pride; none must say that her husband's wife had need to do such a thing. Every one of the fifty-eight was scrubbed clean. The house must be kept neat, even with "the girl" allowed to leave the boys would complete their schooling, and Johann hold his head up again.

The business went on; it earned them a living. The boys left school, and went to work with their father. Charley, the elder, was like his mother, steady, even, dependable; he kept the books, for one thing. Owen, the younger (Minnie was the oldest, and married now), could not be kept bottled. He was, Meissing felt—secretly pleased that it was so—like himself. He it was who always doffed his hat to that strange Emperor who trod San Francisco's streets and dined in San Francisco's cafés gratis, and issued his own currency; who once spread gunnysacks as a royal carpet for His Majesty—Emperor Norton—to enter the store and take tribute for the royal treasury. He was not easy to manage, Owen.

Both boys knew the Olympia, the Thalia, the old Tivoli; Charley would be noisy with the rest of the crowd, or furtive with them when they entered iodoform-drenched Bartlett Place or Fish Alley; Owen gaped, heart pounding and inwardly thrilled, at the circle of seated bright-stockinged women inside, looked in through the negress-opened door and did not enter. (Come 'long, honey . . . come 'long . . . nothin' to

be 'fraid of! Come'n have a nice time, honey, fo' a dollah. . . .) Owen did not, would not, go in.

It wasn't that he didn't want to—he did! He was sick of weighing spuds and beans, sick of checking shipments, sick of San Francisco; he was restless, impatient, quick-tempered . . . he wanted a good time well enough, but if—*that*—the crimson-stockinged girls—were behind him, what more was there? What else to look forward to, to imagine about?

The brothers did not look alike; Owen was very dark, like his father, aquiline-nosed, tall, slender; Charley was two inches shorter and—so the girls of their crowd said—handsome. Volatile also, he was a good amateur actor. Owen was more diffident, and at the same time more eager.

The chance for a change came when news of a neighbor's success in the Orient reached Meissing. This man had no sons: did Meissing want to lend him his? He would see that they were given a thorough business training, and there was money to be made. This man had formerly been in the produce business, and Meissing had respect for his judgment. He wrote that the export-import business was good, and getting better; that a gross of phony jewelry from Hartford might be turned over at five hundred per cent. profit, for example, adding what Meissing and his sons realized, that the produce business wasn't what it once was. The boys, Karl and Owen, would, after they learned the ropes, have a chance to go in for themselves and it could be managed with practically no capital, once they knew the country.

The Orient! San Francisco's intriguing Chinatown

enlarged, magnified, a thousandfold; dancing-girls, temples, elephants, pearls. . . .

Charley, more sedate, wondered if they oughtn't to hang on with their father to the old business, Owen spoke of, dreamed of, nothing but his transplantation; the two brothers talked it over late one night, going over the books for the past five years. When this was completed Charley was convinced that something new was the only way out. He wished, he said, that before they went they could get hold of that scamp Phillips—wherever he was—and square things; the sons were more bitter about that than the father and mother. Maybe (Owen answered) they'd run into him sometime.

"Young blood," John Meissing said to Marianna. "Like Owen—the other Owen—and me. I wonder . . . I wonder . . ."

He always had that doubt. For Phillips, the absconder, he cared nothing, neither for the man nor for the money, but Mary Middleton—where? Was there a son? Were they alive? Or maybe a little daughter, called Marianna!

John Middleton, the son, worked on his "father's" ranch, in the hot flat hayfields of the Sacramento; he was called John Martin, from his new father's name, and considered himself as such, although he knew his real name, that his father and mother were dead, and what little of their history, and his own, that Mrs. Martin could tell him.

"Ja, Johann," Marianna nodded, smiling; what else was there for her? Had not her Johann himself gone from home the same way?

3

The *China* swung past Alcatraz, bucking the riptide. In the noonday sun the sand-hills of the city reflected blindingly white sparks of light, glistening, almost jewel-like; northward, the slopes of Tamalpais blotted tremulous shadows on the bay's blue water. Past Fort Winfield Scott, the bricks already becoming dull, brown, cracked and mossy at these crevices, the embrasures empty of cannon, only the flag flapping valiantly; then the white bar; more sand-hills dark with twisted cypress; the extending coast north, creamy with surf. The long regular silky swell of the ocean.

Charley was in the smoking-room, but Owen stood long at the rail, at once eager, excited; homesick as well: they would be eating now, father and mother and Minnie. Then papa would take the afternoon off, and they would all go out—papa would do it so *Mutter* would not be sad! as if it made any difference—and then they would eat again, and sleep, while Charley and he . . . he choked back something painful in his throat, then went below to their joint stateroom.

The voyage was swift; shuffleboard, flirting, reading, loafing—Honolulu; more shuffleboard, more reading, magic-lantern exhibitions, and at last the thin vapor of the volcano on Oshima, the first of the beads of islands stretching southward from the mouth of Tokyo Bay; the headland of Awa next, and behind it a flat green shore, flocked about by high-sterned matting-sailed fishing boats.

The two men, John Meissing's sons, stood against the rail.

"Wonder if they have American drinks in Japan?" Charley asked.

Owen laughed.

"I don't want any!" he snorted. "I want some of that stuff they call sak-kee. I want it in little cups——"

"Served by a fat little Jap girl——"

"And funny things to eat, and tea!"

As they lighted cigars, straw-roofed Urga, a little village sleeping in a hollow, crept past the ship.

Owen looked up at his brother, troubled.

"The steamer crowd are goin' up to that place—Number Nine," he said at last.

Charley demanded sharply: "You want to go?"

The younger brother shook his head.

"They think they're smart!"

"Sure," Charley agreed.

"At home," Owen said sagely, "a fellow can understand—about running around. You get sick of what you're doing. You know what we had, Charley. Black-eye beans, and pinkeys, and navies—and river spuds—down at six and home at seven—tryin' to get a decent price out of those dam' Chinks at the wharf or the warehouse—beans, beans, beans! When papa was young look at the things he did, the things he saw! Up at the mine with the man I was named for. Fort Gunnybags. Fightin' in the streets of 'Frisco even. I was always comparing that with what we had to do. Now—it's great to get away, Charley!"

"You bet. Papa kept us pretty close. And you know how mama watched the clock on us at night. But I'm glad they did, kind of." He threw his arms in the

air, taking a deep breath. "It's great to get away from the sacks of spuds, Owen!"

They watched the passing fortifications of Yokosuma, and suddenly Charley said abruptly: "It was that old fellow that started the talking about Number Nine and the brown Jap girls. Changing your luck, he called it. He's been all over. Algiers and Paris and everywhere. He makes me tired! Our own dad saw more and did more in ten years than that old codger has in his whole lifetime, and there wasn't anything in it to be ashamed of. H makes me sick! And—he sort of made me feel that a man was like a . . . oh, like a dog . . . when he talked. He'll ask us to go along, too. Know what I'm goin' to tell him when he does?"

Owen grinned understandingly.

"Tell him so for me," he said.

Charley puffed billows of smoke from his cigar.

"I'm goin' to say, 'Look here, old geezer. You certainly turn my stomach. I am not one of your goody-goody fellows. I'm not a young pill. I'm old enough to know a thing or two. I'm not overly moral, but I want you to understand, once and for all, that there are no two ways about the fact that'——"

"I bet I can tell you what you say to him!"

"I bet I tell him——"

"Go on! You ain't going to make any such elaborate speech, Charley. All you'll do is stutter, and say, 'Oh, go to hell'—unless your brother says it first."

4

Their father's friend, August Hittel, left his warehouse in the prefecture of Kanagawa—Yokohama; met the *China* in a sampan rowed by four standing Japanese coolies, four lithe brown figures in sleeveless shirts and legless trousers. When Owen and Charley were transferred to the sampan the Japanese, facing sidewise, oblivious to the greeting by their employer of the two foreigners, pushed on the long oars, swaying out and back to a monotonous chant that ended every line in deep: "hoi! hoi! hoi!"

Off the Bund trim launches skittered about, there were tugs and colliers, junks, tramps, liners, an American tanker, narrow cruisers of the American *Olympia* class with the sunflag at the truck . . .

The custom-house proceedings were precise, short, and the brothers soon in a rickshaw—a *kuruma*—and bouncing over the stone-faced water-front; they were both open-eyed. Gee-whizz! Charley said, and Owen nodded back.

High ugly warehouses off the Bund, the post-office tower, flags flying over the consulates—buildings hidden in trees and shrubbery; a bit of Japanese life: narrow streets of low wooden houses, open shop-fronts, irregular signs with ideographs like zigzag bannerets, signs part English, part Japanese written in square Chinese characters, part in the flowing "grass-hand" . . . small children in dashing reds and ochers and rainbow mixtures under the very wheels of the rickshaws . . . girls with dull kimonos showing only a peep of red in sleeve and petticoat although a riot of color—

orange and royal blue, sage-green and carmine—made up the *obi*, the wide sash. *Kurumayas* and coolies in blue cotton, tight-fitting trousers and belted jackets adorned with huge white ideographs of their employers' names and filleted across the forehead, some with great straw hats, like mushrooms . . . children everywhere, children on the street, in the doorways, children carrying babies on their backs . . . smiling faces . . . smells of *daikon*, the giant radish . . . smells . . . *dai* Nippon!

Dai Nippon! In two days the brothers began to pick up words, and use them. Charley bellowed "O my! o my!" at one of Hittel's house-boys, desiring hot water—*o yu*—to shave; roared "Oh, you idiot!" at him—and got it.

They cared nothing for the "settlement"; Queen Anne cottages might be seen at home; but the Tea-house of the Hundred Steps, the curio shops of Honchodori and Bentendori, the plum-trees in blossom at Sugita, the bathing beaches—after hours, or when they should have taken a siesta—it was new . . . strange . . .

More curios were sent home by the first steamer, silks, photographs, than their mother could find room for in the front parlor!

Hittel had not merely boasted when he said that "business was grand"; it was. Much of their trade was to the Chinese shop-keepers, men of good pay. The brothers worked hard; at the end of the second year Hittel announced that he was going back home, to Germany, after visiting the States first; the brothers bought him out, arranging to pay a sum every year

until the business was their own. They sold everything: brass jewelry, safety pins, dishes, carriages to the consulate-officials' wives, revolvers, farm implements, furniture . . . anything, everything. Also, they shipped materials to America, silks, embroidered kimonos; rice, too.

Before Hittel left the brothers both returned to San Francisco for a visit. Father Meissing was not well; he coughed; the boys had money enough and to spare so that he might seek a drier climate, near where the mine had been. John Meissing liked that. He might, he said, find Mary and the baby there. The baby—it would have been in the thirties, but he always spoke of it as Owen's baby.

It was good to talk to their old cronies of the Orient. Of tea-houses. Of *sake*. They arranged to take over more American agencies. They were busy. Marianna boasted of her boys now, and with cause. That she was able again to be in the same strata, the same money-society that governed San Francisco, troubled her none. She was vaguely glad, for John's sake, that old acquaintances were renewed apparently because of the renewed Meissing prosperity.

"It is not that they forgot me, when we were poor," he would tell her. "They were all busy. Now, when they have time. . . ."

"The men to see you, yes. But the women? Did that Mrs. Hareton stop on her way back to the city to talk old times over? Or have we two sons doing well, and neither of them married—and that woman a daughter? And do they act like—what was her name, whose man had the fur-store on Post Street?

. . . anyhow, she boasts her sons do this, and her sons do that; a diamond pin—*wer's glaubt!*—and a fur coat, but always something that money buys! Our sons, they come to us, and love us, and are proud of you, their father.” She would not mention herself. “And our sons make their own way, as you did. Have they, with their father’s money, started a bank, and from much made more? They go far—as you did; sometimes, *even when they are gone*, and I miss them, sometimes I am glad we had our trouble. For it makes of our boys good men. *Ja!* I talk too much.”

“With such a mother, Marianna, how could they——”

“*Sei ruhig!*” she whispered, pleased, patting his wrinkled hand.

John Meissing seemed to get better in the hills; the two brothers prepared to leave for Yokohama again, full of their plans to open another store in Kobe, and also to take turns going into the country inland after “bargains” in silks, and also to sell, if they could, American goods. Marianna warned them to be careful, and they chorused that they would; Japan was as civilized as any other part of the world—their house in Yokohama couldn’t be told from an American house any place. Why, they had bought it from a Dutch oil fellow, who knew what was what. It was just the same as any other country, except that a fellow had to be a little careful during rice-riots. Inland, of course, it might be a little different.

What kind of food did they get to eat? Owen, gleefully, described the savor of raw fish soaked in vinegar, pickles made of sea-weed, giant radish smelling

like limburger mixed with essence of skunk, until Marianna became frightened. Some one had warned her that raw vegetables in the Tropics caused typhoid; they must promise not to eat any lettuce. They wouldn't, Owen agreed gravely, knowing that it was unobtainable.

Had they ever thought about—getting married? Marianna asked that, also. Both men laughed. They had no time to think about marriage. They were too busy. This was strictly true. Sex was utterly impersonal, and had a very small part in their lives; it was extraneous, divorced entirely from their habits. Both lived largely outside of themselves; they had no time for consideration of their internal beings.

Their father asked them one thing several times:

Had they ever seen Phillips?

Never. Some day they would, and then——

Meissing nodded.

“Take it—out of his hide, boys,” he said. “Mama had it hard, because of him.”

They would.

John Meissing did not go down to San Francisco to see them off. He told them good-by very shortly, curtly, and neither of the brothers saw their mother's eyes glisten when he said it. They had been back a week in Japan, when he died.

He was not in bed, but on the porch, in the steamer-chair the boys had brought back, and covered with a padded silk quilt, also a present from the Orient. Purple shadows in the Sierras, behind the house; purple shadows in the broad valley before them; black blotches on the wide, winding lilac river that evening.

Marianna had been reading *The Chronicle*; Meissing liked to hear of his old friends best of all; news of the world he did not care about.

"Listen, Johann," she said, folding the paper, and holding it closely. "The engagement has been announced of Miss Violette Jacqueline Cohn, the daughter of Abe Cohn, and Washington M. Rosenblum, son of Mr. and Mrs. Sol Rosenblum. Rosenblum is connected with one of the banks of the city and active in club circles. The Rosenblum family are old residents of the city and prominently identified in business and social circles.' You remember Abe Cohn, Johann? The little store on Polk Street? 'Violette Jacqueline! What a name!'

"Prominent in business . . . prominent . . . many a time I sent him something to eat, into his store . . . *Mutter*, even with what Phillips did, we could have been prominent too! *Ich muss* . . . I got to tell you something you should know. I could have—made it easy for you, *liebe* Marianna. I could have made it easy for you——"

"It was easy, Johann," she said.

"All the time—you scrubbed—*ach!* I knew it, *Mutter!*—all the time I had—the money that was—Owen's. In the safe deposit. The money he earned in New York. Some day, Marianna, his wife Mary, or his son, or his daughter—you give it to them. The boys take care of you. Good boys. Good sons. Good . . . good men . . ."

"It was easy, Johann," she repeated, whispering, but this time he did not hear her.

CHAPTER II

I

THE next morning the brothers were ready for investigation of the interior; both spoke Japanese, both were eager to go, and a deck of cards decided the matter. Owen won. The first day he went by train, then left it at a junction-village, to complete his trip into the silk-country by river-boat.

Cries rocking down the river brought him out of the inn at which he had spent the night a moment before the host's summons. A bare-legged boatman sculled him through the confused border of fishing-craft and into midstream, there to wait, one of several, for the steamer.

In some low-roofed concealed temple a Shinto priest's voice began to chant loudly, almost fiercely. It sounded fanatical and defiant, but tremendously believing, proud in the faith it proclaimed to all hearers; heedless it was, and very powerful; almost, Owen Meissing thought, impudent. It stirred him, the wildness of it, and yet he grinned as he looked at the boatman, who, unconcerned, was already sleepy under the sun.

The voice increased in fervor, so that Owen could hear the singing clearly and determine the words. As he listened he grinned more broadly.

*"Hana ka? chocho ka?
 Chocho ka? hana ka?
 Don-don!
 Kite wa chira-chira mayowaseru
 Kite wa chira-chira mayowaseru!
 Taichokane!
 Sokana don-don!"*¹

Owen wondered if the hidden priest would have been as fervent in his prayers as he was in this love-song . . .

A broad boat, no longer than a harbor-tug, churned around a rectangular bend of the river, obliterated the singer's voice with a hoot of its whistle as it passed the expectant passengers, and—a hundred feet distant, strove valiantly for sternway. Meissing's rower sidled fearsomely up to the moving steamer, urged to wakefulness and daring by the white man's promise of ten extra *sen*, and Owen, bag in hand, clambered into her through a small square hole while she was still in motion.

He found himself in a timbered gangway, three feet wide and almost five high, and in the thick of a squeeze of passengers and baggage; once in, it seemed impossible to advance or retreat. The engine-room gratings poured a wonderful fluid heat into the corridor. Meissing waited with the back of his head pressed against the roof until, in some unimaginable way, an officer jammed and squashed through: he followed the

¹ Butterfly is it? Flower is it?

Butterfly or flower?

When you come thus flickering, I am deluded,

When you come thus twinkling, I am bewitched!

Japanese' bulk, reached a doorway, and fell over a heap of sandals and *geta* into the first-class cabin.

The cabin was also occupied.

Polished mirrors and varnished woodwork doubled and trebled the occupants; men stretched at full comfortable length upon the floor; women squatted at their feet. Bars of metal extended across the low ceiling, and from these hung parcels, straw valises, protruding clothing, bottles tied together at the neck, and two cages of cackling crickets that made the air vibrant with their "min-min-min-minminmin—zzzzz. . . ."

The heat was supernatural, and not to be endured. Owen scrambled to his feet and stood in the doorway, the focus of every placid uninterested eye; none moved for him, nor could they. At last he carefully picked his way over the tangle of bodies and outstretched legs (among them a fairy pair belonging to a tiny *geisha*) to an opening in the port side of the cabin. He found himself in another gangway, roofed and choked to it; there was no visible exit, so he climbed over the legs and tried the starboard a second time. During the short interval of the steamer's stopping, this had been clogged, every crevice between body and baggage, with uncration and unhappy chickens.

Meissing, unconsciously imitating the officer who had made his interference before, made a reckless dash amid frantic cluckings, and succeeded in breaking through and scrambling to the cabin roof. This was piled with vegetables and green melons, the former making a bulwark against the rolling overside of the unripe green globes; the port corner only was free of this edible cargo, held so by a giant coil of rope.

Meissing shoved some of the cargo aside, and sat on the edge of the roof, legs dangling over the ladder. Forward he saw the top of the tiny second cabin with Japanese gathered about a brazier—*hibachi*—quiet now that the boat was in sight of a town, but ready to break into laughter and cries the moment she was out and down the river again.

This was something like!

The train-ride had been terrible. The contrast between the Yokohama home's strict cleanliness and the Japanese traveling was astonishing; he had heard stories, but believed them exaggerated. Banana-peels coated the car floor; egg-shells, tobacco, everything unedible found its way into the aisles. Mothers sat nursing their sturdy offspring. One Japanese woman actually forced the breast upon an irritable five-year old; he wiggled and protested, but she handled him as though he were a sack of millet, and finally won out, stifling his yowling with a mouthful of breast; others did the same with younger children, giving them whole bananas and tea between courses.

Five Japanese sat all through the trip drinking electric whisky by the tumblerful, and as the potent fluid took effect criticized the appearance of the foreigner—the *seiyo-jin*—with great frankness . . . it had been terrible. He had wondered if the whole trip would be like that. If it were, the *habutæ* and *kutani* pottery and *makie* lacquer might go to the devil for all of him.

But this was something like, sitting comfortably on the top of a river boat, with a little breeze to cool him. He found and lighted a cigar.

The boat gathered speed with a stunning scream of

the whistle. In another instant her funnel began to pour soot upon Owen; then came cinders mixed with the soot, and some of them were red-hot. Meissing tried to imagine a method of changing his position without another charge upon the fowls. The second cabin was forward of the stack, and the Japanese upon it were noisily content, but he saw no way of getting to it. Nor was there any way to escape the stack's volcano save crawling on his belly over the precariously shifting cargo. Worse, his seat was proving unsteady; whatever he touched that seemed rigidly braced or clamped securely proved to be dangerously mobile. In the midst of this the frightful little craft began to swing, and the melons to rush back and forth with the swaying. Meissing stood up, cautiously trying every stay before trusting his weight to it, and looked enviously at the high pile of rope. Notwithstanding his care, a taut rope slackened as he held to it when the boat dipped, and he went head foremost into the giant radishes.

He lay there an instant, clutching at the rolling melons, then began to paw his way to the coil of rope, reached it, climbed up on the lower circlings of it, and pulled himself over, and into the haven. He wished, now, that he had brought his bag, and had something to read; he closed his eyes and tried to sleep vainly.

The steamer had left the last river-but with overhanging balcony behind, the town was completely out of sight behind a bend. A path shadowed by overarching trees followed the water. A stone *torii* with figures of apes chiseled in relief. Another *torii*. A place of prayer, containing nothing more than a lacquered

money-box. A Chinese roof upon withered bamboo stakes, cut too green. A shrine, empty of any deity. Broad steps out of the river, sleepy lions of wood at the top, with a temple somewhere hidden in the trees. The smoke of the steamer blew higher, lifted by a light firm breeze; sharp sweet scents of growing things reached Owen, and soon a blood-brightening mountain wind. Pale white clouds began to form without beginning or shape, all at once.

The passengers on the forward cabin's roof chattered gaily. From below came snatches of minor-tuned songs, and, at intervals becoming closer spaced, women's laughter shrill and clear. The night slipped on, misty and sharp. Both banks of the river dimmed; the great stone *torii* became lank gray ghosts, no longer to be distinguished from the trees about them.

Wakeful, Meissing saw a funeral procession slipping along by the wan glow of uncolored paper lanterns, a short train of indefinite figures gray-robed and gray-hooded. A troop of ghosts, like the *torii*. The shapes became hazy, in moments lost all form and drifted into the darkness of the bank. Firefly-like, the lanterns pricked on through the gloom; the bell of a concealed temple clanged to greet them, a smaller gave pizzicato accompaniment. The chatter of the steamer voices stilled, and in place, from the banks, came a high nasal chant for the dead. Below-decks the *geisha* laughed twice, the second cut short as a baby's sudden cry of pain.

The great bell sang again, more rapidly, and with steadily increasing clamor, wiping out all other sounds in the reverberation.

Owen was, he told himself, wide awake. Here was Japan: here was what he had wanted; all the strange things he had imagined the Orient held—he would find them. Strange temples . . . strange people . . .

Yokohama had become almost like home: there were the races, tennis, tea, a little gambling—but here was something different. The real *dai* Nippon! Charley, he believed, had been half glad that he had lost in the draw; Charley was growing very interested in the Field girl; not the elder one, but Ruth of the red hair. That was well and good for Charley, but he, Owen, was satisfied as he was. Didn't they have more than enough Jap boys to care for them, and a good Chino cook, even if he "squeezed" nearly a dollar a day Mex for shopping and fought with the house-boys . . . he, Owen, wanted to *see* something. After a while he'd settle down. But it was good to get away; cinders, banana-peels, drunken Japanese, what did that matter? He was going to see something different, do something different.

Yes, Charley was thinking about marriage; hadn't he said that the white women were wise as to where the little Jap girls lived? the ones who sent their "friends" red-knitted ties for Christmas? Hadn't Charley worn an ordinary tie, instead of the masonic-like badge of the "white brotherhood"? He hoped, he knew, that Charley would be happy. The Field girl was a good sort. Soon they would be forced to open a San Francisco office to do their buying, and Charley could care for it; it would be good for mother to have one of the boys home. Charley could come out every two years

or so, and let him get away for a vacation in the States . . .

He was glad that they were making money. *Mutter* had easy days coming to her, but he doubted if she'd take them . . . she liked to work. He was not so certain that he liked work himself, unless it was something new. Then it was a cinch. He wondered suddenly if either Karl or he would ever meet Phillips. The fellow probably had changed his name—they didn't even know what he looked like . . . oh, well . . .

It was good to get away! He hadn't known, until now, how tired he had been of Yokohama; now he was free . . . the bell's clamor died away, but the air was filled with faint sound, like an insect's monotonous humming. A dazed moon tried to penetrate the clouds, achieving nothing but a phosphorescent gleam . . . the echo of the bell was drugged to silence . . . the boat rocked gently, and ripples swished away from her blunt prow . . . Owen slept.

2

He was cramped, cold and very cross when he awoke, and wishful for his own Yokohama boy's summons to bath and breakfast, yet he had slept well enough, and only the squeal of the boat's whistle had awakened him. The Japanese on the top of the second cabin were preparing for departure, and Meissing called to them in Japanese: "Boat where is?"

Matsuoki, one of them answered.

With that Owen scrambled out of his coil of rope,

crawled over the vegetables, the Japanese commenting loudly and laughingly, and dropped to the deck. His bag had been known for what it was, and despite the thronged hatchway, stood alone. Who knew what might be in it? The *seiyo-jin* might even be a priest, and the bag contain his gods: it was a good thing to leave alone. He grabbed it, elbowed a way to the opening outboard, and roared for the first approaching sampan. When the high-nosed craft was three feet distant he threw the bag in, and followed it . . . this was something like!

There were no *kurumas* in the little village of Matsuoki. Owen asked the way to the inn and started on foot, a half-dozen ragged urchins at his heels, jabbering interestedly, but silent if Owen turned his head. He tried to persuade one of them—with a *ten-sen* piece—to carry his bag, but they edged away carefully. *Hai!* were they fools? Let the *seiyo-jin* find some one else to use in making his sacrifices to his gods!

It was early morning. Coolies brought their sleeping-quilts to the second-hand shops, exchanging them for the clothing they would wear during the day plus a miserable copper piece, coming (at night) for the quilts again, and again making payment.

Shops stood open to the street, a few of the more pretentious ones having strips of cotton cloth in front, each strip stamped with the house-sign or trade-mark, the *ya-jirushi* white on navy blue, or an ultramarine upon white. Brooms, sieves, piled-up crockery and wooden-ware, *geta* and sandals, piece goods, tea jars . . . the floors were raised and matted, the dealer, seated among his wares, pushed forward a *hibachi* of

coals to light the tiny pipe every man-purchaser carried, as an aid to the bargain. Some of these little merchants called "*Irashai!*—come in!" as possible customers wandered down the street. Little cries from the rear of the shops . . . *arigato!* . . . *matai irashai!* . . . *sayonora!* . . .

All this uproar, Meissing thought happily as he walked, was very foreign to the practise in Yokohama or Tokyo. There the guest was seated on clean matting, possibly in a remote corner of a *kura*—godown—those black-roofed, high, narrow buildings of thick plaster walls sloping out a bit at the bottom, the windows small, high up, tight-shuttered; then he was shown the bright *obis*, heavy *kaiki* and close *habutæ*: here it was different. Why, Yokohama was even becoming civilized, like the States, with its new fire-engines answering the watchmen's bells—one stroke if far away, two strokes nearer, three in the same ward, and a furious beating if close by. This thatch-roofed street was very different! It was the real Japan.

Coolies ate at the eating-shops, queer morsels spitted on sticks, or munched big sweet-potatoes. A flower peddler—*hanaya*—trotted along with his portable shop, a pair of bamboo frames slung on a cross pole, each having four shelves, where the flowers were set in little tubs . . . the fish-vender, carrying sets of shallow wooden tubs fitting into each other in layers . . . the bean-curd man . . . all rushing, all calling: "*Hoo-da! hoi-da!*" Shops displaying egg-plant, lotos-root . . . dried cod and cuttlefish . . . pickles . . . old crones chopping *daikon* in their doorways . . . the inn at last.

Poor Charley, in Yokohama! The Field girl—what did Charley see in her? Owen could not think.

The inn was larger than the houses about it. Each upright was set in a large stone, rounded, hollowed on the under side, in which a stake was driven into the ground and roughly socketed. The building might slip and shake, but in an earthquake nothing more than a shaking of the tiles could occur, tiles of the roof, not fastened, but simply laid in a bed of sticky mud: even this tiled inn had a memory of thatch in the prominent ridge-pole, and in the backward slant of the gable ends, which make the roof slope four ways.

The inn's entrance was on the side; before Meissing was in the little space of packed earth acting as a vestibule the host was ready for him, and behind him three serving-girls, all bowing deeply, to honor this *seiyo-jin* visitor, who doubtless had gold to shed, and did not know the price of anything.

The first protestations over, the host shoved back a panel near the entrance, showing a spotless room.

Owen shook his head.

"Say, what do you think I am?" he said in English, then, in fluent Japanese: "I desire an honorable room, inn-keeper!"

"I did not know that you understood," the fellow answered simply, and this established relations on a better footing.

The inn-keeper guided Owen along a narrow corridor, polished of floor, and to the *zashiki*, the guest-room, farthest from the door, and opening on the tiny garden. On the two outer sides were *shoji*, sliding panels running on grooves, translucent. The inner

wall was alcoved, and in it was the *tokonomo*—the sacred corner; a raised platform, untouched by paint, but rubbed to a high polish, showing the cherry-colored grain of the wood. On it was one blue-black flower vase, bearing a single late iris, hanging above the one ornament was a hanging scroll of the *Three Good Fishermen* and their catch. Mats covered the floor, two inches thick, each bound at the end with black cotton, each three feet wide and six long; it was a large room—a ten mat room. The host called attention to that. It was the largest and finest room in Matsuoki, barring only the Shinto temple.

A writing-stand ten inches high, a *hibachi* for warmth and for lighting pipe or cigarette, a low chest of drawers against the inner wall, a few wide square cushions to sit on—that was all. No sign of bedding, although Owen knew that this was hidden in some compartment.

"This," the inn-keeper said, "will be your servant." He indicated by a jerk of his head the maid-servant on his right. "She is as good—as may be expected in these days. But she knows a few things. She understands how to sit and how to rise, how to handle the tea, and how to walk, but there is a great deal more to be absorbed before she becomes perfect. But she is the best we have—outside of *geisha*. Will she do?"

Owen examined the demure little Japanese girl.

"She will honorably serve," he said.

With the affirmative in her ears the maid padded to the *hibachi*, stirred the near-dead coals to blazing, then darted away for tea-service.

"Honorable inn-keeper——"

"Kagawa, my name is, honorable . . ."

Owen grinned.

"My name is Owen Meissing," he said.

"*Hai!* what a collection of sound. O-wen My-ying . . . that is difficult to say, even for one of my education. I think we call you Owen-san. That other I will never get, and it is too long, anyhow." He nodded to himself, satisfied, then added, "I will be forced to tell the police your business. Have you got any, or are you a priest? We have never had a foreign priest here, although there are enough of our own to eat us up!"

"No. I'm not a priest. I'm looking for—silk."

"Silk? *Ho!* white man! in the bolt, or about pretty bodies?" Kagawa said, misunderstanding the other's hesitation at stating his business. "But either way we can satisfy you! . . . There, I will tell the police that——"

"I am looking for silk!"

"Did I not say it?"

"Yes, but——"

Kagawa blinked at him.

"Would you have me tell those busybodies your true business? There will be one of them about soon enough. Will he let you talk to him in Japanese? Not he. A little red book with *seiyo-jin* words and Japanese words he will have. 'Who?' he asks. You tell him. 'Why?' he says. You tell him. Each time he must search for the words. Then he will say, 'What?' and you will laugh, knowing him for the fool he is. And so he goes off angry, and will dodge about after you, believing that you are a criminal, a spy, anything save what you actually are. Now I will say to him, very

boldly, for he owes the inn money, 'Little officer, go home. Kagawa will discover everything, and let you know in good time'—and there the matter ends!"

They had been standing, and as the maid entered with her pots and tiny cups Kagawa calmly sat himself on one of the *zabutons*, and indicated the other to Meissing. The servant poured tea delicately.

"I am no common inn-keeper," Kagawa went on, hissing loudly to show his appreciation of the flavor of the tea. "I am——"

"I can see that," Meissing murmured.

"*Hai!* You laugh."

"No. I only——"

"You laughed! I do not blame you. Owen-san, I was educated to become a priest. Prayers in the morning, and prayers in the afternoon, and a triple praying in the evening. . . . I could not stand it. So I say that I am no common inn-keeper. Of course, being a priest has compensations, but it is no longer like the days when the shogun gave the priests permission, once a year, to drive the men-folk from any house, and take their place for a day or so. Now you must pay for what you get . . . it is, all things considered, better to be an inn-keeper. Especially since I am no longer young, and like my ease." He emptied his cup again. "Now, since you spoke of silk, and being a silk-merchant—of which I am not sure yet, since . . . a silk-merchant, I call to mind a story that I heard. It was told me by . . . who told it to me? . . . by a . . . it does not matter who told it——"

"I am tired, and need to——"

"There! It was a good story. I told it some time

ago to another *seiyo-jin*—the one who taught us a strange card-game, and took out more gold than he paid us!—and he thought it——”

“I need——”

“All in good time, Owen-san! All in good time, what you need! This white man—of what was I talking?——”

Meissing stood up unceremoniously.

“Some other time,” he said as courteously as he could. “I slept on top of the boat last night. I’m tired. And I need to bathe.”

“The story was, as I told it to the white man—*hai!* a bath? You will find our baths at Matsuoki the finest in this province. Of course we can not give you a tub here—only in great cities will you find such things—but the village bath is as hot . . . hot! it will take the skin off you, and what more can any one want? It is in the house behind the bamboo palings. One house—two houses—three houses—and then the bathing-place. Is that not simple? Have we not every convenience in Matsuoki?”

3

He found the bathing-house with no difficulty, was given his blue-edged rough towel, a square cake of soap, a brush, and shown by the maid to a small room with slatted floor. He stripped, and seeing basins and pails filled with water on the floor, scrubbed away the soot from the steamer. This wasn’t the way he’d been told they did in the interior, and he was ready to souse himself of the soap when the maid entered calmly, and, drawing back a wooden screen, indicated an oblong

plunge, ten feet wide, and fifteen long. It was empty, and Meissing went in cautiously; the inn-keeper, Kagawa, had not lied, for it was very hot. At first the heat was uncomfortable, and Owen wondered if he were being parboiled, but soon the stinging heat seemed to brace and stimulate him, and he soaked blissfully.

He was not left alone long.

The maid who had directed him to the plunge had been bad enough. It had flushed Owen as the hot water did now; she was a tiny woman, small, brown, without a stitch of clothing. She didn't blush—why should she? It was all in her work. He had gone into the plunge, after that, willy-nilly, to escape the curious eyes of the attendant, who was discovering for herself that the *seiyo-jin* were really white all over!

He had not been in the heated tank more than a few minutes before a dainty damsel entered with as much clothing on as he had. She came in boldly enough, although her eyes were held carefully to the surface of the water; she was soon followed by another, and the two supported each other in virtue by huddling in a corner. An old man came next, and behind him a male attendant, who sat on the plunge's edge and chatted with the women.

Owen did not know which way to turn. He had bathing enough, but could see no way of getting out of the confounded tub without . . . no, he must stay there, and outlast the women. . . .

That was useless. It was the morning bathing-hour, but added to that Kagawa had informed the bath owner that—for a consideration—he would suggest a

plan to make money: the bathkeeper had followed Kagawa's advice, and a letter sign outside read: "Come *seiyō-jin* all white see!" and Matsuoki intended seeing.

Gosh, but it was disgusting! The girls were like brown dolls, all right, but it wasn't—darn it, it wasn't nice! Nobody else seemed to mind it, it seemed ordinary, commonplace; he guessed it was his own evil mind.

The room filled. Owen decided to creep to the edge of the tub nearest the room in which he had undressed, and then dash into it; discarded that because of the laughter that must ensue. Very gravely, although his face was crimson to the ears, he stood erect, and, clad in dignity, strode out of the water and from sight.

It was, the Japanese decided, as good as a show, any day of the seven. He was big, that white man! The arms on him—fit to strangle an ox. No need to envy the *geisha* after that. One of the girls whispered to her companion (the only indication that Meissing might have been masculine) that the *seiyō-jin* had a strange habit of holding their lips against a woman's and it was said that the result was very pleasant. . . .

4

"Why didn't you tell me what happened in that place?" Owen demanded of Kagawa, when he was back at the inn, and asking for food to be brought him. "It wasn't a bath—it was a theater! And I was the actor."

Kagawa shrugged.

"Are you not clean?" he asked.

"Yes, but the whole village——"

"That is what a bath is for, to make you clean. Outside. I believe, Owen-san, that inside you are very clean. Now, that other white man, when he came—as you did, by the boat—had never been in the interior. He asked about the bathing . . . and I told him there was none. He did not have good eyes. For another thing, he was old. For a third, I did not like him very much. No sooner had I left him in his room—*hai!* he took one near the entrance, knowing no better!—no sooner did I go than he behaved as if the servants of the house were *ne-san*—which they are not. He had nasty eyes. I did not like him. He asked for *geisha*, but would a girl desire to entertain such a snake? But I must say this. He listened to a story"—Kagawa grinned broadly—"he listened to a story about silk, that I was going to tell you. I must tell it. He came from Nagasaki, and he was really one of the old samurai. He wore a great embroidered kimono, and carried a pilgrim's staff——"

"The white man?"

Meissing believed that Kagawa was going to tell that story. Let him get it over with, then.

"The white man? No, not Feep-san, but the one of whom the story is about, and——"

"That's a strange name," Meissing said, taking delight in heckling the host. "Feep? I never heard a name like that. You must have made a mistake."

"Listen, oh, one of stopped ears. Did I say Feep? I did not. I said 'Feep. Feeep!' Is that not clear? Feeep! *That* was his name. He——"

"That was what I said, honorable inn-keeper. Feep."

Kagawa looked at him quizzically.

"It seems," he said, his head to one side, "that you do not understand your own language. Or you hear poorly. Or possibly I am crazy." He raised his voice, calling: "O-Kuné! O-Kuné!¹ Come quickly!"

The little maid-servant pattered in.

"What was the name of that old one—the *seiyo-jin*—who tried to rumple your kimono and see what was beneath it?"

The girl bobbed her answer: "Feep-san."

"You see?" Kagawa said, pleased. "Knowing no better, she calls him 'honorable,' but I simply call him 'Feep,' which is enough for him. The girl does not understand, for she has not been in the inn long. She did not call me, that time, as she should. She bit him in the hand, however, which sufficed. I think he called her foreign names, this old one."

Meissing had been smoking a cigarette of long, silky Japanese tobacco. The conversation of the unknown man's name had amused him: he had often done the same in Yokohama, knowing that the English pronunciation was different from the Japanese version. Suddenly he dropped the cigarette to the matting, and the maid swooped for it, depositing it in the brazier, and taking another from the lacquered box beside it, to give it to the white man when he demanded it. . . .

"How old was he?" Meissing asked sharply.

"How old? My age, perhaps. But his fingers were clever. They moved the little paintings of emperors and princes that comprised the game he taught us——"

¹ Miss Cloth-of-silk.

"How old?" sharply.

"Can you tell the age of a pine by glancing at it? Ask the women, they would know! There, Owen-san . . . how old, you ask. Sixty, perhaps. Seventy, possibly. But he still had the desire to see women smile, as if he were a sapling, and——"

Owen was trembling now, excited, and still very cold.

"His name was Phillips!" he said steadily enough.

"Did I not say that? Feep! Were I without witness"—nodding at the girl—"I might not prove it. *Feep* I said, of course!" He drew a leg more comfortably under him, preparing at last to launch into the tale, when the white man's face arrested him. "*Hai!*" Kagawa snorted. "What have we now?"

They had plenty, it seemed.

Owen's face was pale, pinched at the nose. The story of Phillips, of the harm he had done the Meisings, had been—still was, actually—only a tale, a fairy story with a man as the ogre; Owen did not for an instant think that this was not the same man. It must be. The age was right; the fellow would be in his late sixties or early seventies. The card-game—had not Phillips been a gambler? As to the girl part of Kagawa's tale, wasn't that right in line with what this swine would do?

Yet doubt wisely assailed him: how could a gambler go about in Japan, teaching the brown men a strange game? It was foolish, and he breathed with relief.

"I think you're giving me a made-up tale, Kagawa," he said. "Would a Japanese visit America to make

money at *ken*? Teaching you a game—you must have learned about it at Tokyo, or heard——”

“He sold things, and bought curios also,” Kagawa interrupted. “The game was only for the evening.” Lowering his voice: “Do you know this man, Owen-san? If you do, tell me nothing good of him, for I do not like him.”

“I might . . . I guess . . .” Owen began in English, then added in Japanese: “Do you know which part of my country he came from?”

“From that place where those of our land go when they leave,” Kagawa answered. “Where the oranges are not small, like ours, but big as melons.”

A sharp thrill went through Owen.

The myth was becoming a reality. He was foolish to think of the man so—even if it actually was Phillips, the same Phillips. This wasn’t ’fifty-two, when men took justice into their own hands. What difference did it make? Charley and he were making money. Mother was comfortable, happy; she would be completely satisfied when they returned to the States to stay, as they might some day. Yet . . . “Take it out of his hide!” . . . that was what dad had said; it must have been pretty nearly the last thing he said, too, when Charley and he had left home. Dad hadn’t cared for himself, but for their mother.

He stood up, pushing the *zabuton* away, frowned, and took several paces back and forth, while Kagawa and Kuné watched him curiously. He stood still, feeling a fool, impatient with himself.

“What is it?” Kagawa asked finally. “Remember

that I have been a priest, and as such know a great deal. What have I said that should so anger you?" The old Japanese, shrewdly, knew well enough. "Tell me."

Why not?

"Kagawa-san," Owen said, carefully looking away from him, "if a man should have—stolen—so that—your mother suffered, what would you have done about it?"

Kagawa shrugged his shoulders.

"Vanished gold is like the spume on water," he quoted sagely. "What would I do? Get more!"

"And the man?"

"Should he become rich, I would remonstrate with him, and attempt to have him give it back as a gift, since he no longer needed it."

"If he isn't rich?" Certainly Phillips couldn't be.

"Is there money in the branches of trees?"

"In the nests of birds," Kuné, the maid, corrected him under her breath.

Kagawa, hearing, snorted, leaving what he would tell her for such conduct to come at some later time; the girl assuredly needed training in the Precepts of Womanly Conduct.

"I think you are wise," Owen said. "What good would it do?"

"None—if you get no money!"

"My dad"—in English, and then in Kagawa's own language—"the father of my house desires that I find this man, and——"

"Why did you not tell me of that first? It alters the matter! When did he speak of this?"

"Before I left home. He said——"

"*Hai!* All of the words I have given you return to me. An order from the head of your house! Now I see why you were angry. I apologize and degrade myself before you, Owen-san! Consider my words unspoken. What you must do is this; first find this *Feeep*"—gripping his hands together—"and after you have squeezed him dry"—his hands working—"like that, then say to him softly, 'Now, old one, pray to any gods that you can remember.' That is wise, for it averts anger from the gods of his own family—if he has any, which I doubt. Then, after delicately trimming off the ends of his thumbs, and his toes, if you have time, take the knife you use—I will give you one if you have none available—and——"

"I don't want to kill him!"

"Am I talking of killing? I should, for I do not like the man! I was simply getting ready to discuss what we—you, that is—would do to his nose, after which——"

The maid-servant giggled.

"You're an old fraud!" Meissing said in English, perceiving that the servant knew her master. "Honorably get out, Kagawa-san. I am going to sleep while the food is being cooked."

5

It was full midday, hot, stifling; Meissing pushed back the outer *shoji* facing the little rock garden. He stretched out at full length on the matting, gazing idly outside. About the central stone lantern, with slender

tope and lotos petals about the base, the upper corners curled back, were clumps of *botan*, great satin-petaled bush peonies, of all hues; snowy white, cream, rose, pansy-maroon; over them was a bamboo screen against wind or rain, but Meissing could see them clearly. They seemed too large. Artificial.

The street of the Chaste River, on which the inn was, at this hour became very silent; Meissing almost thought he could hear the whirr of dragonflies' wings in the little rocked garden.

He moved a bit on the matting, restless, and resolutely closed his eyes.

This was what he must do for weeks, possibly a month or more. An inn like this, in a village like this.

To-morrow he'd go out into the silk-district; it was too late to do it now. Too hot. Too dam' hot. He felt sticky, despite the bath. Charley'd be up at the club now, eating in comfort. Drinking real cold German beer. Muenchener. Charley wasn't such a fool; pretty soon he'd go home, and take that Field girl with him. Charley a fool? Charley was a wise boy, while he, Owen, was the ass. *This* was what it was going to be for him, now! He wondered what sort of *geisha* they had in Matsuoki; he wasn't crazy about the Jap girls, but at least they tried hard to amuse a fellow . . . he guessed that he must be a little lonely. No, that wasn't it; how could he be lonesome with what he had ahead of him? He was just worn out a little. To-morrow he'd be on the jump, looking for silk. When he got back he'd have a million-course dinner, with the prettiest *geisha* there were to be had serving it.

He twisted on the mat, and sat erect.

Charley must be written to. There wasn't anything to tell him, but . . . there was; he knew there was. He opened his bag and took from it paper and pencil, and set to work.

"Got in this morning. Haven't done anything yet. Will go to-morrow and see what there is. Matsuoki is hotter than Yokohama. It is hotter than hell. I forgot to check over the invoice from Sherman, Hopkins. They add like fisherwomen, so you had better do it. I have changed my mind about getting Minnie's husband to come out. Write him, and make him a proposition. Then he can take the next trip into the wilds. He's honest, even if he is a boob.

"Be sure and send me up any silk quotations that are interesting. Until I get them I'll go by those I took with me. Write mama and tell her I'm fine, but too busy to write her. Also give my regards to what's-her-name Field. Write me here, and send on mama's letter and Minnie's that came in on the mail the day after I left. Nothing new of importance.

"Yours, OWEN.

"P.S.—Our old friend *Phillips*, or an old man of the same name, is in the neighborhood."

He thought he should add something to that. Suppose he met Phillips? What then? What could you do to an old man? Papa had forgotten that when he had told them to "take it out of his hide": that was the way they did in 'forty-eight, but you couldn't do it now. He guessed he'd leave Phillips alone, if the fellow left him alone—which he would, Owen was certain.

Both Owen and Charley were living up to the words of their father: they were "good boys"; never a steamer

left for home but that mail was on it; the account they built up for themselves was paralleled by one for their mother; they told her (as their father had done before them) just what they were doing in the business, and what they proposed to do, and on those rare instances when she gave advice, followed it.

There was a woman, Owen thought now, on his matting in Matsuoki; how many would have done as she did when they were youngsters, and dad had to begin all over, after that Phillips rat had taken all they owned? Many a time dad had told him and Karl: scrubbing the steps early in the morning, so the neighbors wouldn't see her—cooking, baking, patching. . . .

He lighted a cigarette.

Maybe (he thought) he'd have to take care of that old man Phillips after all. He hoped, vaguely, that he would not meet the man.

The way the swine'd acted with the little serving-girl, Kuné. As if she were a paid *ne-san*. If Kuné had really been pretty, you could sort of excuse the fellow, but she wasn't; it had been just that she was a woman. That was the way with white men in the Orient: they kept their own vices, and added the Japanese ones to them.

Sure, he liked to see the *geisha* dance; it was pretty. It didn't stir him, the way they did it at Yokohama, like it did some of the men who had just come over and were running wild. He had noticed that those kind of men were in the minority. Give a fellow plenty to do—as he had before, and as he had now, with the silk-buying ahead—and he was safe and decent, since he was busy with different things. Sagely,

Owen decided to himself that Charley and he had the right idea; they didn't consider such things as important, as a big part of their lives—that is, they hadn't, but if Charley were going to get married it was different.

He was in better humor now, and ate his *tai* with vinegar, and boiled sweet-potatoes, and golden persimmons, with relish, taking his siesta afterward with no difficulty at all.

CHAPTER III

I

THE noon of Owen's departure for the interior Charley received a blue-enveloped cable; he had been busy in the office at the rear of the store, and held the cable in his hand while he finished making a "proposition" to a prospective customer. Then he opened it casually.

"Father passed away last night. Minnie."

He looked desperately at his companion, grateful that there was some one with him at that moment.

"Go—on—talking," he said hoarsely.

"For an extra five per cent., Mr. Meissing, we can see our way clear to take twenty gross. You understand we have heavy expenses. Now, if you can make us some sort of exclusive agency for Nagasaki, we can guarantee you sales of—what's the matter?"

"I got to go," Karl Meissing said.

"What's the matter? You sick?"

"I? Sick? Yes, I guess so. I don't feel—very well. You—you better come back to-morrow. No, wait until my brother comes in from the interior. Yes, you better wait——"

"But we can use the goods now! This is the best season. Say an extra three per cent. instead of five . . . surely you don't need your brother to trans——"

Karl pushed the papers in front of him away, and reached unseeingly for his hat.

"You wait for Owen," he repeated dully.

On the way out he stopped long enough to tell the "head boy" to get him passage on the T.K.K. the next noon for San Francisco, and, holding his hat crumpled in his hand, hurried down the street, to arrive, breathless, at the Fields' house fifteen minutes later. The Japanese boy who opened the door decided that Meissing-san was very drunk indeed—drunker than any *seiyo-jin* he had ever seen, and he had seen many.

What happened, when Ruth Field came up to him, Charley never knew, nor in what order. He had liked her before, and possibly more; at the thought of binding himself down to endless tennis or tiffin he had inwardly balked; now, full of his trouble, instinctively, he blurted his news all at once, waved his arms incoherently, and found that in some unexplainable way she was in his arms, crying with him. . . .

For once Yokohama was forced to do without a gay wedding, with every one of the mercantile crowd there who mattered, and a sprinkling of the younger attachés; there was no great wedding-breakfast at the Grand Hotel, no popping of Mumm or Cliquot, no more than the ordinary hilarity—that night—at the tea-houses where the *geisha* were pretty. It was hardly a wedding at all, Yokohama felt, without all that. Ruth and Karl were married just before steamer-time, in the office of the consulate, and left immediately after on the little *Kobe Maru*, a freighter, for

Honolulu, intending to transfer there to one of the quicker Matson boats.

Karl wired home that he was coming. It seemed impossible to explain that he was bringing a wife with him, that he had just been married; it *was* unexplainable: they would never understand it—mother might, when he had told her how it all happened, but Minnie couldn't. He felt, even now, that she would not like it. Well—it was his wife . . . *Mutter* would be satisfied, after she grew used to it.

If it had been possible he would have waited for Owen to return to Yokohama, but he dared not miss the first boat. Of course he was needed home. *Mutter* would take it hard, although, had she been of the same age as dad, it should have been far worse. She would (he told Ruth) love her new daughter. A wonderful woman, mother.

To get in immediate touch with Owen was hopeless. He wrote three similar letters, to Matsuoki and to two other villages where Owen might make his headquarters: it would be rotten on Owen, alone up-country, to get the news. Owen would understand about Ruth; they always understood each other, these brothers. What Charley wrote was this:

"Dad passed away. Got the wire when I came back to the store after seeing you off. I'm going home. Left instructions here to just keep going until you get in. Do whatever you want about the business in hand. Ruth is going to marry me before the *Kobe* sails to-day, and go with me. Wire me care of the T.K.K. at Honolulu anything important, and be sure to write home.—CHARLEY."

Two of the letters—all were addressed in both English and Japanese—returned in a week to Yokohama, unclaimed, but that sent Matsuoki did not come back to the office of K. & O. Meissing, and the head clerk was satisfied that it had been received, and that Mr. Owen had written, in reply, directly home. One letter was received from Matsuoki, which the clerk forwarded, but it had been mailed before Owen could have received the letter from his brother.

2

Twenty-six days brought Karl and Ruth to San Francisco. During that time the sadness in the California-Street house had space to become distributed, less poignant, reminiscent; Marianna would say, now, "Johann liked this" or Minnie, "Poor papa did that" without looking away from each other. . . .

The funeral had been held in San Francisco, and hundreds of men came, men gray-bearded, mostly, who had known Meissing "in the old days." When the safe-deposit box was opened, and the packet of currency discovered there, together with the directions that the money was to be given Mary Middleton or her heirs, no greater tribute could have been paid the man than the fact that none whispered that he had concealed this after Phillips had absconded, as a nest-egg; they knew better. They knew him for what he had been. All had a word for Marianna. He had been a fine man, her Johann.

One of John Meissing's old business associates and

his two sons, were made executors; the estate was small, and what there was belonged to Marianna.

Neither Minnie nor her mother knew just what to make of Karl's wife. Ruth was different; she had been a resident of the Orient many years, and could not see things as they did. She had friends of her own, also, Yokohama or Tokyo people now in the States; she was accustomed to the fact that Karl was doing extremely well, and thought the frugality of the California-Street household rather silly, foolish, old-country. Accustomed to being waited on by Japanese "boys," she watched Mother Meissing ladle the soup at the table's head and saw the plates pass from hand to hand with something of fear; Minnie, who, between courses, waited on the table, refused to let Ruth help at first, and, while the dishes were being removed, there were often long silences, during which both Ruth and Marianna were uneasy. Ruth could talk of bridge, which was just beginning to be heard of, or how much the cook, marketing, was permitted to "squeeze" from the daily food-money; Marianna knew to a two-bit piece the difference in prices between the California Market and the Clay Street, but how could she speak of this to some one who had never carried a basket? Gradually, however, the talk would drift to Karl, or to Owen, and then the conversation became more than monosyllables. The three women were friendly enough. Minnie felt (as Charley had guessed) that her brother might have waited before getting married zip! just like that, with poor papa just gone; she never spoke of this, even to Marianna.

Unconsciously, mother and daughter criticized the

newcomer. They did not consider that Karl was entranced with his wife's blonde daintiness, and that she was wise in keeping him so; they believed the pale frocks she bought extravagant, and the accumulating hat-boxes something to worry over. Marianna was uneasy, seeing so much money going out, but was sensible enough to say nothing. What, she wondered, would this delicate Ruth have done if Karl had lost his money, as Johann had? Scrub steps? *Ach!*

The misunderstanding went no further, for both mother and daughter were fearful of doing anything that might bring unhappiness to Karl; it disappeared entirely for a time when Ruth informed them breathlessly that she didn't know if she were going back to Yokohama with Karl . . . she didn't know just what to do . . . she wanted to stay in the States, where there were good doctors . . . good climate . . . for a while, anyhow——

The very idea thrilled Marianna. She—a grandmother! Karl's little baby. A little one in the house. Her friends—she had no intimates, but merely acquaintances—had always seemed to fear the coming of grandchildren more than the coming of their own children: it marked, apparently, an age that set them apart as old. It removed them entirely from the younger generation and, even if they were comparatively young, pointed to the world that their time of child-bearing was over, and from this time on they must be spectators only. Marianna had none of this feeling. She had, moreover, no thought of conquest for the Meissing family, nor even hope of greatness; she felt that, through Karl, a portion of herself was

about to be recreated: that she had served her purpose in the world once and twice, and now, soon, a third time. A little grandson. Or granddaughter, what matter?

Minnie, likewise, was delighted; she had none: she was not strong, and her husband—the boob, as Owen called him—would not think of “taking a chance” and having anything happen to her. The women spent hours down-town on Kearny Street; the relative merits of canton-flannel over bird’s-eye were argued pro and con, patterns littered the spare room, Marianna showed Ruth how little jackets were knitted in the old country; the older woman even insisted that before Karl sail he must take a day and go into the country, to find a house for “afterward,” until Ruth became strong again.

Karl had been very pleased, but was half oblivious to all the excitement at home. His mother had refused Ruth’s assistance after dinner, and was in the distant kitchen, Minnie helping her. Minnie’s husband was up-stairs, trying to fix . . . something. He was always fixing something. Ruth was sitting opposite him, in the “back parlor,” on a low chair. There was a large shaded lamp in the room, on a distant table, and Ruth had turned the gas off; the lamplight, Karl thought, gave to face and figure a sort of strange beauty that was sad, almost ethereal, like the red and gold castles children see in the fire. They glow—and there was a sort of glow to Ruth; they crumble—and there was a pathetic something in Ruth, too, which suggested wistful desires, faint hopings . . . an ending in ashes, almost.

She told him then.

"You are going back by yourself, old boy!"

Karl let it sink in, and sat, watching her, silently, summoning up arguments—he couldn't leave her alone *then*; it wouldn't hurt her at all to cross the Pacific again, but be a rest, after all the shopping and stuff; her own people were in Yokohama, surely she'd want to be there. He wondered if she were staying simply because his own mother would prefer it so, be pleased thereby. If anything happened, he'd be a whole month away! And he wanted Ruth with him!

She smiled at him, knowingly.

"Better doctors here, Karlie. That's why. Guess it?"

He shook his head honestly.

"Guessed everything else, though," he said. "I wish . . . I didn't——"

"Of course you must go back," she said evenly. "I'll be all right. And you know you've been worried about Owen!"

He had.

"It'll be . . . kind of hard . . ."

She smiled at him daringly, and retorted: "It'd be harder if——"

They heard the swinging of the kitchen door squeak, and Karl went rapidly back to his own chair, leaving Ruth to pat her hair where he had rumbled it with his embrace.

He had been worried about Owen. For three steamers—a month and four days—only two letters had come from him; one was readdressed from Yokohama, and spoke of his arrival in Matsuoki, the other,

by the second steamer, was written to Marianna; it was the same as every letter that he sent home: he was busy, he was well, it was hot, he would write more next mail. Nothing of their father. Nothing of returning to Yokohama—the letter was from Matsuki. Karl waited for the third mail-boat to arrive, and, finding no letter, save one from the office which showed clearly that Owen was not there, cabled them to get in touch with Owen immediately, and have him come down to Yokohama. What was the matter with Owen, anyhow? He could not have received Karl's word . . . yet if all of the letters had been returned, undelivered, to Yokohama, surely the head clerk would have mentioned that fact. He said that two had come back. Owen must have got the other. Darn the kid! what was the matter with him?

To his mother, Marianna, Karl said that Owen must have written her, and the letter was missent. He went into great detail about the slipshod way Japanese mail was handled, especially up-country, and only succeeded in making Marianna feel that the interior of Japan was a place where wild animals and wilder men made life for a white man a terrible thing.

3

Karl liked to leave the house early in the morning, and meet Ruth, or Ruth and Minnie, for lunch. He took an endless delight in taking them to places where Owen and he had eaten when they were first working for their father: he even swung open the door of the Commercial Bar an instant and let the giggling

women see where the free lunch was. And it was good, too, he insisted, when they laughed; nowhere had he ever eaten better corned-beef. He took them down dark streets smelling horribly of green hides, of crated chickens, the odor giving way as they walked to spiciness of long strings of red peppers, of apples; there were dim wholesale shops redolent of the cheeses stacked away from the sun, pungent with the heavy scent of Italian olive-oil, of garlic. . . .

There was the little restaurant where a fellow could get wild ducks as wild ducks ought to be cooked. Stuffed with a few stalks of celery, and served with wild rice . . . he took them there. Neither he nor Ruth, both Orient-trained, were at all distressed when the proprietor, while inspecting the aspect of the cooked birds judicially, announced to Karl: "You got a nice girl now!" They laughed and Ruth pretended to believe that she was not the first woman Karl had brought there.

Karl protested:

"If you knew Pierre's, Ruth, you wouldn't say that. Why, Pierre won't let a woman in unless she's got a wedding ring—not even to eat!"

"You must have tried, Karl?"

They laughed immoderately at that.

Whether or not Karl had actually brought girls to these deliciously quaint places to eat Ruth never worried about. Karl loved her, and she him: there were plenty of other things to occupy her thoughts; they were married now, of course, and that changed everything for the future, what possibly happened before was of no account. She was not innocent of the fact

that men weren't lily-pure, but had no time to brood over it: she loved Karl as he was. Innocent: didn't she, and every other Yokohama woman, know that the Jap girls knitted those bright-red ties the men wore around Christmas? But when Karl needed help, sympathy, love, did he go to one of the brown maids? What more could she ask? It was sweet, sweet, to be with him, happy, laughing, utterly content.

Before he would meet her he would unconsciously gravitate toward the old produce district, on Drumm Street, or Battery, or Beale, and talk things over; now that he was away it was, somehow, more interesting; he was willing to listen to the men saying that spuds were high and getting higher—it looked like the Japs were getting a hand in things, although of course they'd never dominate; then he would tell them what he knew of the Japanese, and they would listen respectfully . . . yes, *sir*, you're right . . . funny kind o' people, hey, Charley? . . . it was good to know something the other fellow didn't. The Japs'd never get anywhere in the States, he told them, and, since it was in the 'nineties, they solemnly agreed. As solemnly he advanced his arguments.

For his next-to-last morning he decided that he would arise early, have a cup of coffee with mother—Marianna was up by six, always—and then dash down to the wharf as he used to do. A portion of the enjoyment would come because he knew he didn't have to, every morning; it would be rather exciting to see the river-boats come in, and watch the boys fight for the cargoes. Be good fun. And what an appetite he'd have for lunch when he met Ruth; in-

stinctively he suggested that they meet, and eat, earlier than usual; he said that he'd be mighty hungry—which was true in part: he knew that Marianna would, herself, cook an enormous supper—dinner—for his last night at home, and that he would be expected to eat hugely of the old German dishes. He whistled loudly as he stamped short footwarming paces on the front platform of the cable-car, his coat collar turned up; lord 'lmighty, dinner was going to taste good—his nose wrinkled as he thought of it as the car clanged on through the heavy fog: there wouldn't be any funny salad, but noodle soup, with *Mutter's* noodles cut paper-thin. . . .

He dug in his coat pocket for his package of Imperials, and lighted one of the tube-ended brown-paper cigarettes.

Funny he hadn't heard from Owen. Karl wondered, with quickening dissatisfaction, if Owen had actually met Phillips, and with what result. It was possible that the man was *the* Phillips, yet the name was a common one. Had anything happened? He was, he felt, silly to worry; Owen was free, white, twenty-one, and perfectly able to care for himself: Owen was always lucky—a thing like that couldn't happen to him, Karl, in a million years.

The receiving-dock seemed cold and cheerless. A man's face was indeterminate five feet away, and all of the produce men seemed intent on their own business: they passed Karl with a wave of the hand or a nod, and made him feel distinctly apart, foreign to their interests. He watched one man buy a lot of potatoes that he considered anything but extra at a

fancy price, and was vaguely glad. The first noise of buying over, the men had time to stand about; they gathered in groups, smoking, here and there heads were together—a minute while one voice spoke quietly, and then a burst of laughter . . . that's a new one! got to remember it! . . . one of his old cronies called to him, and he joined the collection of buyers about him. A porter from this man's store was busy stenciling the purchased sacks—M-J, with a shield about it; Karl knew this stood for Maynard-Jacobson & Co. Jacobson was the buyer.

Meissing took out a few potatoes from one of the slit sacks.

"Good spuds," he announced judicially.

"Pretty good—for rivers," Jacobson agreed. "Ought to be. Cost plenty these days."

Karl grinned.

"Remember when we only paid——" he began.

"That was a time when labor was cheaper," a strange voice interrupted.

Jacobson nodded toward the speaker.

"Meissing—meet Mr. Martin," he said. "Martin ships us spuds. Come in with the boat. Mr. Meissing used to be one of us," he added in explanation to the other. "He's just kind of lordin' it over us. On a vacation."

The two men shook hands.

"You fellows both came from the same part of the state," Jacobson went on. "Up near Sacramento, wasn't it, Charley? Martin's father didn't go in for spuds, but Johnny's using the lowland for it."

"Above Sacramento," Karl said. "That's where

dad used to be, when he came out here. A dinky little place, somewhere near Downieville."

"It sure is cold, in the fog," Martin said. "I need some breakfast." Then: "Downieville, Mr. Meissing? Ever hear of a place called Chipps' Flat? Isn't even on the map any more."

"Hear of it? I should say so. That's the town dad's old mine was near. Know anybody up there?"

Martin shook his head.

"My mother and father lived there."

"How long?"

Jacobson shook his head gravely, and winked. "Next thing they'll be saying, 'Remember the old school-house?' and 'Who'd so-and-so marry—she was a swell girl!'"

Martin smiled.

"I don't exactly know," he said to Meissing. "Some time, I guess. You see," he added quietly, "my mother left there before I came into this country." He saw no reason to go further than that, and said again, "I'm mighty hungry, Jake. Pleased t'meet you, Mr. Meissing."

"See you again," Karl said vaguely, as Martin and Jacobson started to leave the dank wharf.

The departing men were almost obliterated in the fog when Meissing walked quickly after them.

"I forgot to ask you something," he said hastily. "Whenever my dad met any one from the mountains, or near them, he always asked them a question; guess I ought to, too. Ever hear of a fellow—I mean a woman—named Mary Middleton? She married dad's old partner."

Martin smiled broadly.

"Guess you were right, Jake," he said to his companion. "Going to be a don't-you-remember party, after all! Why, Mr. Meissing, the truth is——"

"You know her?" Karl stuttered in his excitement. "Where is she? We've looked for her all over! Where is she?"

"She's dead, Mr. Meissing. Been dead a good many years . . . over thirty. . . . Yes, sir, she's dead."

"Hell!" Karl muttered.

The other smiled again.

"I don't think so, Mr. Meissing. She must have been a good woman——"

"Good! Of course she was good! My dad said that she was the finest there ever was, except his own wife! Good! She was th' salt of th' earth, Martin!"

"Thanks," Martin said briefly.

Karl looked at him, and grunted.

"What you want to thank me for?" he asked curiously.

"For what you said about her. I—never was very sure, myself; some day, maybe, I'll tell you about it. I never knew her, you know, although she was my mother."

"Tell me about it . . . never very sure . . . I—don't understand," Meissing said. "You—never knew her? She—how'd you get that name, Martin? She marry again? That her second husband's name?"—all breathlessly—"Why'd you use it, if she went off and left you when you were a kid? I—what th' hell are you sayin', anyhow?" he demanded.

"I was not very clear, Mr. Meissing," John Martin

said. "No wonder you are confused. (You never heard this, either, did you, Jake?) You see, my mother died when I was born. She'd left Chipps' Flat for some reason or other, after my father died." Karl believed he knew the reason: to find his own father. "The people in whose place she died were named Martin. They took care of me——"

"Your real first name John?"

"Yes. And of course——"

"John Middleton! I wish dad had known that!"

"They were dirt poor, but they . . . things are going a little better, now I put spuds in. Good it's that way, for (I forgot to tell you this, Jake) I'm a married man, and——" he smiled apologetically, concluding, "I guess that's the history, Mr. Meissing. When you aren't busy, some time, won't you tell me what you know of my people?"

"Some time! Busy!" Swiftly: "Listen, Jake. Be a nice boy, and go up to the store and go over the books, or cuss the porter, or hang out a Wells-Fargo sign; only, run along, please, Jake! I'll take care of Mr. Martin—Middleton—and you know I'm not in business here any more, so I won't nail him to a bum contract, like you were going to!—say, Jake, remember the currency in dad's safe-deposit? And this fellow planting spuds like a Chino!" Jacobson, understanding, puffed out his cheeks. "If I were my brother Owen, John Middleton, I could get the words out better"—Owen would have said exactly the same of Karl—"but . . . oh, damn it, man, my father kept intact a small fortune for you, and we—Owen and I and Minnie—always considered Uncle Owen's lost

baby—we called him that always—although we never knew him—as our brother or sister, if you'd been a girl (what's funny about that, Jake?)—I always thought, if we ever did find—you—that you'd still be a kid, and wearing long dresses and—diapers. . . .

"Let's get a drink!" he ended, vociferously inarticulate.

4

The Meissings had John Martin—John Middleton—to dinner that night. Marianna reserved judgment on him all through the meal, although she piled his and Charley's plate indiscriminately; when, after, they went into the back parlor, and she heard the two men talking, she decided that John was a fine fellow, and fit to be named after her Johann. Thusly:

"I'll turn the currency over to you, John," Karl had said. "If dad had kept it in securities it'd be more, but he took absolutely no chance. He wouldn't even touch it when we were positive there were no Middletons to claim it, and he really—anyhow, we'll get it in the morning, before I sail."

The other drew thoughtfully on his cigar.

"I think—you better invest it—any way you like," he said slowly. "Just send me the interest. I don't know much about handling money. I'll take a couple of hundred with me."

Karl answered carefully, "If you want. I'll have the securities I buy put in your name, and we'll go to a lawyer——"

"I don't like lawyers. You take care of it, and do as you think best. If you don't mind the trouble."

"No. I don't mind. I'll arrange to have the coupons—there, you don't care how it's handled. When Owen comes out, next year, he'll go over the bonds I buy, and see . . . Owen's got a long head. You'll like Owen."

"Any way you want."

Marianna knew that Johann would have liked that.

Owen Middleton's son promised, before he left, that he would come down to San Francisco again, and bring his wife; he said, flushing, that he guessed he would have to come soon, for his Mar'gret wouldn't want to travel after a while——

Karl whooped.

"You have a girl, and we a boy! Then maybe some day——"

"Better let us have the boy," the other said slyly.

Ruth laughed softly at the two men, Marianna thought it would be nice, Minnie crimsoned at the indelicacy; what kind of talk was this, she was thinking, for Ruth to be hearing! she glanced at her sister-in-law, but Ruth's face was averted, although the smile still lingered in her eyes.

Karl's wife was smiling, also, when she and the Meissings saw him off; Marianna's eyes were very wet, but only the sister was forced to the handkerchief. He must make it easier for Minnie, Karl figured haphazardly; she didn't have a cinch, keeping her husband in good humor; that colorless man had the ability to annoy both Karl and Owen by his very inertia.

For the first time Marianna expressed her fears about Owen, and the lack of word from him. "He never writes much, nor do you, Karl," she said in a

shaking voice unlike her usual firm tone. "Just the same, only a line keeps me from worrying. Is it"—looking at him with sudden fright—"is it that you keep something—about Owen—from me?"

It was nothing, Karl insisted, save that the inland Japan mails were noted for being unreliable

"He is only a boy, Karl. Be careful for him. Now, you are married, and a man. Take care of Owen. He is only a baby. And"—lowering her voice—"send me a cable if anything is wrong, *um Gotteswillen*, Karlchen!"

"I'll cable the minute I land, *Mutter*. But you mustn't worry. Owen's all right. It's just those confounded mails from the interior. *I'm* not a bit worried."

His mother's direct look made Karl's heart jump with sudden fear, as she said simply, "If you say it is all right, it is all right, even while . . . I am afraid. . . ."

He tried to throw confidence into his voice as he repeated, "I know everything is O. K., *Mutter*; if anything were wrong, I'd have heard from the office, anyhow."

Manlike, Karl's last word to Ruth was for assurance, confirmation of something about which he had no doubt ever, and never less than now. The ship's gong was clanging, when he whispered:

"Love me?"

"*Chitosé*," she answered back—Japanese for "a thousand years."

As her face became, from the steamer-deck, a white, disappearing blur, Karl thought that she looked a little

wan. That would never do: wasn't she with *Mutter*, his capable, serene, wise mother? Nothing could happen. He must reassure her, if she were worried about *him*; as the first gull swooped past the moving boat, he waved to her with a motion as wide, free and sweeping as the bird's wings.

He was wild to get to Yokohama. Owen—what was Owen up to? And how about this man Owen wrote of? Phillips. Was it the real Phillips? Gosh, but there would be a lot to do at the office, especially if they opened a branch! And he must get up into the interior, and see some of the funny sights . . . it was hard on Ruth, but she was safe, protected, and he wanted to do things again.

Married life, he believed, offered men a sweet secluded cave into which they might retire when the world became wearisome, too combative; a place of retreat, a *part* of life, having little relation to the rest of things, where there were deeds to be done, places to be seen, battles to encounter: he was on his way, he felt, to all of these.

He waved again, blithely; above the loud cries—good-by! good-by!—from the dock he heard Ruth call again, although he could not see her, call in her high clear voice: "*Chitosé, Karl! Chitosé!*"

CHAPTER IV

I

BROODING heat and the quivering white sunshine of the summer solstice oppressed the village of Matsuoki, and Owen Meissing unlaced his shoes and stepped out of the dankly hot street and into his airy room in the inn; all of the panels, save only those which opened on the garden, were closed tightly: he was vaguely glad of the beauty and detached calm of that garden—it suggested nothing limited nor stunted, despite the tiny trees, but vastly vigorous sensations. In the rock pool whiskered carp sprang out of the water with a shower of sapphire drops as they pursued green-winged flies, and the water showed large circles, concentric from the upward lunge and downward fall, which died away gently toward the pool's edge, lapping almost noiselessly on the rocks. Crows exchanged their sinister signals among the two larger trees, and from time to time flew languidly from one to the other.

Air and water seemed to vibrate unceasingly, dragon-flies flecked the transparent surface of the water, under a rock a rabbit caressed his ears with the sleek grace of a cat, a pet bird flashed its glittering plumage, crying shrilly; the noise, Owen thought, vibrated in time to the heat-waves.

He stepped to the house's edge, and the crows set up a discordant clamor, harsh as the rasp of an over-used phonograph needle—caw-caw-cawrrrr.

How long had he been around Matsuoki? A week? Two? A month? Long enough to know silk from egg to brocade, but not long enough to have found Phillips; once their trails had crossed, and he had nearly encountered the man right in Matsuoki: he wondered how it was that Phillips had left the village, not even remaining to eat. He did not know, and none thought to tell him, that the *seiyo-jin*, the old one, had received a letter, and this letter had hurried him away. The letter had been given Phillips—had he not said that it was his?—but it was not for him. It was that which Karl had written his brother. “Do whatever you want about the business in hand” Phillips had read in it. The business in hand! what other might that be save finding *him*? That John Meissing had died only affected Phillips in the sense that the father's restraining influence would be gone, and the sons, young, hot-headed, would . . . what wouldn't they do, if they caught him? Phillips was gone.

Owen wished that he had heard from Charley, if only to tell him what to do with the absconder—if he caught him. It was, of course, probable that Charley had written him, and that he had not received the letter; however, he decided, if Charley had anything important to say his brother would have written again. . . .

He had been busy around Matsuoki. With the intentness that was part of his heritage he had delved into sericulture earnestly, believing that a thorough

understanding of all the phases involved in silk-making would be of benefit to him, and to their business. It was pleasant, learning something new, and there had been much to see.

Mulberry-trees, as he had known them, existed only in the valleys, and the leaves were coarse and not highly esteemed. In their place, as food for the silkworms, the mulberry were planted in rows three feet apart, and kept trimmed back to low bushes; at a distance they looked like a low terraced vineyard.

Throughout the district about Matsuoki every thatched house had a room set apart for the silkworms, clean, airy, warm, but sheltered from the direct rays of the sun. This room was filled with slatted shelves, piled from floor to roof, and, on mulberry-leaf beds, hosts of pale green or brown-and-white worms squirmed and ate. Putting his ear near the shelves, he could hear them at their endless feeding, a faint, uncanny, crisp rustling sound. When small, the worms were watched, day and night, and cut leaves fed them; the beds were cleaned daily, except when the worms cast their skins—a hemp net was spread over the tray, covered with fresh leaves, and the worms crawled to it and were transferred to a fresh tray. Between the last change of skin and the moment of beginning to spin they ate, Owen was told, three-fourths of all the food they took in their entire existence.

On little twigs of rape or small faggots of brush laid across the trays the caterpillars climbed then, and hung themselves; in five or six days the cocoons were finished, the best selected for breeding, and the rest exposed to hot sun to kill them.

He had missed the early spring hatching, when the egg-cards were brought from the store-house and set in a warm place, and the *haru-ko*—the spring children—coaxed out to begin their short career.

Women and children did the work, and even babies knew how to pick up the worms, and tell by the size, color and transparency how old they were and when they would begin to spin; often an *Oba-san*—grandmother—directed the operations, a woman who remembered before the Black Ships came to Japan, and when water-power filatures were not thought of. In almost every house old men and women sat on the floor winding off skeins on the old hand-reels with marvelous deftness, as if the great spinning-and-weaving factories at Osaka, Kyoto, could not possibly exist: it was their livelihood, and they could not stop, nor did they desire to.

He learned the secret of making crêpes, how the woof threads, from three to fifteen threads of reeled silk representing as many cocoons, were tightly twisted, half to left and half to right, the two kinds woven in alternately, the dipping of the web making the crinkle. The twisting was done on a large hand-wheel—*o-guruma*—the dipping really a boiling in water and straw-ash; the fabric was then washed, stretched and rolled on a wooden cylinder to dry.

The old women, their initial shyness in the presence of this *sciyo-jin* who spoke their language assuaged, talked as they worked. They told him that spinning was very old; that the Sun-Goddess herself spun hemp or bark fiber; that an Indian queen shut her step-daughter in a hollow mulberry trunk and threw her

into the sea, and she was carried ashore on the coast of Japan—out of gratefulness to those who cared for her, she turned herself into a silkworm when she died: “*Yoh!*” one ancient woman told Owen: “It is not as it once was! Then *good* silk was made. Brocades, with gold woven in, for the nobles! A sight they must have been, when they met in a tea-house, ceremonially! But now—so my grandsons tell me, who have been in the cities (that is, one of them went to Osaka, once) nothing is worn by the rich save blue or gray. Of course,” she added, grinning toothlessly, “the *geisha* will always wear bright colors. I can remember when the *Kingire*¹ wore bits of brocade on their sleeves . . . the samurai . . . *hai!* those days are past . . .”

It was hot in Matsuoki, hot even in Owen’s straw-matting room. He took off his coat, shirt, trousers, and slipped into a thin cotton kimono, glad of the freedom it gave his body; why didn’t he wear a kimono all of the time, instead of stifling his limbs in heavy fabric, or even duck or linen? Why the devil didn’t it rain? Didn’t every one say that the summer rain cooled? Wasn’t it late this year? the people said that also. Lord, but he’d like to cool off some way besides sluicing buckets of tepid water over himself. He wondered if he ought to go to the bath-house, but the idea of getting into the boiling tank nauseated him. He stepped about the room as if it were a cage. He was sick of Matsuoki. What more was there to do? Hadn’t he ordered all the silk they could sell? Why didn’t Charley write him? He ought to go back . . . he was tired of rice, of fish . . .

¹ Brocade rags.

Still walking about, he clapped his hands.

"Well," Kagawa said, entering, "do you not walk enough outside? A sleep would benefit you. Sleeping, you would not have summoned me, and I could have continued dozing. I was dreaming pleasantly——"

"I want something cold to drink," Owen said. "I'm burning up."

"If you drink what is cold, you will make steam from your own heat," the inn-keeper assured him. "Now, it would be better——"

"To have some boiling tea?"

"Some delicious tea, daintily and correctly served, and——"

"Oh, get out, Kagawa! Go away—far. Tea! Boiling! Hell!"

"Hell," Kagawa retorted, "is, according to our belief, and as the priests tell us, very cold." He grinned. "You like it there, yes?"

Owen nodded. Explosively, he broke into: "Isn't it ever going to rain, Kagawa?"

The inn-keeper shrugged his shoulders. "Last night I went to the temple," he told Owen. "We asked the priests to pray for rain. The abbot sent one of the younger priests to look at the sky. Since it was cloudless, it was decided not to pray for rain just yet. Those priests—ho! but they are wise! They will wait until the sky is black, and then give us some tale that if we do not pray *then*—and give the temple gold—the rain god will not bring us water! As if the great Takakami did not bring rain when he desired, and not before. I can tell you, Owen-san, there has been tried

many things, in the daytime, when you are away. The priests have gone about bellowing, straw dragons have been plunged into the waterfall, but it does not rain. To-night they will try something else . . . and so it goes."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Which *geisha* you want to serve you food this evening?" he went on. "The little one, or the thin one?"

"None!" Owen said. "And I don't want any food . . . I'm going to try to sleep now, and then perhaps stay up when it gets cooler to-night . . . *if* it gets cooler . . ."

Kagawa bobbed his head.

"I send you one of the old women to fan you," he declared. "You do not appreciate youth and beauty! What could be more pleasant than gently falling to sleep, and dreaming of the joy of the pretty girl who fans you—you, Owen-san, your trouble is this: you have too much to do. A *geisha* entertains you and delights you when she is in the same room, but, having other interests, you forget her the moment her arm is away from your neck. Now, consider me: I am old, but I am still able to yearn delightfully—yes . . . I am going, Owen-san . . . I am on my way . . . but, remember, after you are asleep I will send to fan you the most toothless hag in Matsuoki!" He grinned broadly. "You will assuredly have nightmares!"

2

He was refreshed while the fan moved above him, gently; the very motion of it lulled him to sleep, and he awoke when it was dark and cooler. The air seemed

breathless, and as he sat up the thought came to him that it was going to rain. He listened, and did hear a pattering:

"Does it rain, Kagawa?" he called loudly.

"Rain? Not yet! You hear the *geta* of the men returning from the lake near the mountain. It will not rain, the priests say, until they return."

Meissing girdled the kimono he had slept in, and hurried through the corridor to the street.

As if by magic stalls had been erected, in which to serve V-glasses of shaved ice flavored with almond or vanilla, every *shoji* was thrown back, and the ordinarily dark street was yellow with light, although overhead the sky was inky, heavy.

"Hear them?" Kagawa panted, coming up to the white man. "Two days ago the band of men left Matsuoki. They went clear to the lake, and gathered water in bamboo stalks, which were sealed. Then they returned swiftly, and those who took the water handed it to others, all running swiftly to our village. If they do not come fast, the sky-water of the rain god will join the lake-water at the wrong place, and Matsuoki be left dry! When *we* get rain, we will give some of the water in the bamboo to other villages. But we must make certain that there is enough for us first!"

"What are all the little shops on the street for?"

"After it rains, there will be a festival."

"And if it does not rain?"

"*Hai!* unbeliever! It will rain. The priests made sure of that before they let the men go. (*I think that, anyhow!*) The lake-water goes to the temple, where there will be a great ringing of bells and counting of

beads, after which the priests will see if they can drink more *sake* than the rest of the people. They usually do, Owen-san!"

The noise of the *geta* was closer now, and with it came a loud chanting, and the thrum of a small drum, accompanied by a shrill wild cry: *Hoi! hoi!*

Owen's figure became erect. He smiled. *This* was something worth while: the inertia of the early evening was shaken from him completely.

Hoi! hoi!

Priests from the temple had met the runners on the village's edge, and, their kimonos or robes tucked high, ran with them toward the temple. Kagawa and Meising followed; the procession was added to from every house, all running, all eager, half intoxicated by the noise and excitement.

"Easy! Easy!" Kagawa panted once. "My legs are not so long as yours, white one!"

Exuberantly, Owen picked the little Japanese up, and, still running, carried him.

The throng laughed. Ho, but that *seiyo-jin* was a strong one! If he could do that with a man, some one whispered, what couldn't he do with a girl?

An imperceptible gray mist lustrous as wide-meshed silk floated about the cornices of the temple like the body of a ghostly dragon. Each bush, each stone lantern, in the temple-yard seemed to take fantastic shapes; the running multitude had no eye for the little lakelets that trickled reflected light of the lanterns, nor for the heady perfume of the flowering plants; they burst across the flagged court, kimono sleeves moving gull-wing-like; like wraithy spirits they poured into the

temple, where slow nasal chants and incense arose, one steadily as the other in the heavy air. Before the seven-armed god of the temple burned rape-seed oil lamps, and in the flames locusts singed their wings, and nastily cremated below.

The oldest priest waved his arms for silence, not expecting it. He finally brayed the throng down with: "Have we rain so close that we will see drops disappearing, and never have the ground wet? Silence, fools!"

The sky blackened.

Outside, the stall-keepers hoped that the rain would hold off until they had made all possible sales.

Incense curled and twisted about the god's face. The priest composed himself to begin the Thousand Words of Perfume: he had barely begun when there came the first crackle of lightning. Every head turned, but hardly quick enough to see the first torrent of rain rush down, like a silvergreen curtain . . .

"The god might have waited until we were back at the inn," Kagawa grumbled. "Come, Owen-san, or we will have a bath in earnest!"

Owen flung his head, outside, to the rain. It was delicious to feel the water pelt on his face, dampen his hair: he threw his kimono open to it at the neck.

"You act like a flower," Kagawa muttered, protecting himself as best he could from the downpour.

"*'Ich bin wie eine Blume!'*" Owen sang loudly, and laughed.

He could not tell why his spirits had so risen; doubtless, he imagined, because of the change from the long dusty days. . . .

The rain came in sheets, drenchingly, with fierce force.

"I will go no farther," Kagawa grunted. "I am old, and the water will get into my joints and make them stiff. Here is a tea-house, and I will wait in it until the rain becomes something less than an overflowing sea."

Owen patted the other's sodden kimono-back.

"Fine!" he said. "We'll eat here, and then I'll have something beside the rice-and-fish you give me every day, Kagawa!"

Kagawa leered at him.

"Is it food you speak of?" he said. "The rain is assuredly making you grow from a boy to a man, Owen-san . . . There . . . you can not become angry because I spoke the truth!"

Owen flung his arms out, holding his hands palm upward to the rain. "Angry?" he roared. "I'm not angry, Kagawa! It's just good to be alive!"

"That is what a fish would say, if it were in so much water," Kagawa retorted. "Come, let us get in, or my lungs will become gills, and my legs a tail!"

3

Every outer panel of the tea-house had been slid shut against the driving rain and lapping wind. As Meis-sing and Kagawa entered, they heard the old servant who came to welcome them cry to shut the panel; this they had done. Inside, they saw the reason for her order; in another adjacent room waitresses, stripped to

the waist, sat before their little mirrors, making their toilet for the evening. The ancient woman-servant hoped that her honorable guests would pardon such a welcome; the girls were almost ready . . . what *geisha* would they desire?

"Any," Kagawa assured her. "I am not particular. All I desire is one not ugly, of good figure, able to play and sing and tell stories, knowing the proper method of serving, and agreeable. I am not hard to please. Any girl like I have described will be satisfactory. Now my *seiyo-jin* friend here, he will wish——"

"A jolly one," Owen said.

The servant looked thoughtful.

"I could . . . hmm! she might please you, being a white man, but she does not smile so very much——"

"Why please me, being white? What has that to do with it?"

"She is half-white," the servant explained. "Her mother lives near Matsuoki, but eighteen years ago was in Kobe . . . This girl—Kikuno—has been on our list for months, but none desire her attendance. She does not smile very much——"

"Send her to us," Owen said. Grinning, he added, "We'll make her smile, eh, Kagawa?"

"When she sees us," Kagawa said, holding his drenched kimono away from his body, "she will assuredly laugh! I feel like——"

The servant whimpered: "I had forgotten, honorable guests! I will send fresh dry kimonos. I will have a brazier lighted, and remove the water from your august garments. I will——"

"Do it, then," Kagawa said crossly. "And remem-

ber that we are cold, hungry and desirous of many attentions!"

The kimonos were brought, and slipped on. Kagawa and Meissing sat on flat cushions—*zabuton*—while one of the waitresses of the tea-house broiled tiny pieces of meat on the brazier before them. It was tantalizing and Owen could have devoured the whole of it, yet it was delicious torture, for each mouthful was worth waiting for.

"*Sukiyaki* is very good," Kagawa said, his mouth full.

Five *geisha* came, and Kagawa looked them over gravely, discussing them placidly with Meissing.

"That one is too fat," he decided. "And *that* appears to have training and education: probably she knows too much, and has been in too great demand. The next one, now, Owen-san, appears cross, despite her smile, and we will pass her by, returning to her if necessary. Now—this is better. She is not handsome, you will observe, but she has charm and character. You, in the red kimono, what name do you go by?"

Yoriko, she told him demurely.

Kagawa nodded; the four other girls left, and he went on: "Where is my friend's *geisha*? Must I wait all night for entertainment?"

"Kikuno came improperly dressed, Kagawa-san," Yoriko said hastily. "The other *geisha* are seeing to her attire . . . it is her first time here. She is very frightened. She——"

"Outside it rains water, and here words," Kagawa said. "Is there no tobacco ready for my pipe?"

The girl hastened to fill it.

Dry, warm, yet not too warm, Owen watched the little *geisha* stuff Kagawa's pipe with a few silky threads of Japanese tobacco. The room was spacious, the floor covered with very soft matting; a bright screen stood in one corner, on it four flying storks gold against the green background of earth, bamboo and sky. Yoriko knelt before the brazier, ready to take Kagawa's pipe after he had taken the three puffs which would consume the contents; she watched, in the old servant's place, that the coals remained properly rosy.

There was a bustle in the corridor, and Owen looked toward it.

She was fairly tall and very slender. Not, Owen decided, over seventeen or eighteen. Her silks and embroideries were both glittering, fabulous, and the gorgeous raiment would have made any other *geisha* happy. She came in with the usual bow, and knelt silently before the white man.

Kagawa looked at her curiously, and then turned to hand his pipe to Yoriko, whose face showed satisfaction that her sister-*geisha* looked so well dressed, and envy of that very thing . . .

The ancient woman shut the panels, set stands for food and drink, and hustled out to bring both for the girls to serve.

Owen looked at the girl opposite closely.

Her skin was soft, tan, like a white girl's whipped by summer winds; her eyes were not slanted, but brown nevertheless, her nose small and aquiline. Her full, almost voluptuous mouth drooped. The bright kimono hid any suggestion of figure: she looked, Owen thought, a frightened doll. It rather frightened him;

she looked very much like the girls at home, except the dress . . . curious! that her white father should have left such an indelible print . . .

"How do you do?" he said suddenly in English.

The girl's eyes fluttered at him.

"Does the white beast not understand Japanese?" the Eurasian girl asked Yoriko. "Must I——"

Yoriko brought her finger to her lips for silence.

"The white beast understands Japanese," Owen assured Kikuno. "If you think I am a beast, why did you come here to serve me?"

Abashed, for she had been certain the *seiyo-jin* knew no Japanese, the girl kept her eyes to the matting, and did not answer.

Kagawa elevated his first tiny cup of *sake*, smacking his lips gustily.

"Does the yellow part of you object to me?" Owen asked. "If it does, I will send for another *geisha*. Kagawa—call for——"

"No," Kikuno said swiftly. "No. It is only . . . I have never served as a *geisha* before . . . I was frightened . . . I will be very good . . ."

"Ho!" Kagawa announced shrewdly. "If she does not come home with her share of our payment to the tea-house, there will be a beating, eh, little one?"

Kikuno's swift glance at Kagawa's interpretation was answer enough. She said nothing more, but busied herself serving Meissing with the food the waitresses now brought in, and replenishing his cup with *sake*. At intervals the white man—as was proper—would rinse the little cup and fill it, giving it to the girl.

At last even Kagawa admitted sadly that he could hold no more. The food-stands were removed, and more bottles of rice-wine brought, then all of the panels were shut, removing the room utterly from the rest of the tea-house.

Yoriko, giggling, was persuaded by Kagawa to dance; a queer movement of her fan and body only, that impressed Owen none at all, although Kagawa was loud in its praises. She uncovered her *samisen*, and strummed on it, singing over and over,

“By a famous beach
Pine tree sees faintly,
Pine tree sees blithesomely faintly!”

and she and Kagawa would giggle together, as if the sight the pine tree saw was secretly funny. The joke was, apparently, better, since Owen did not perceive it. She sang it twenty times, and it seemed to be a part of her, to emanate from her as perfume might. . . .

Owen, on his knees, wondered if he would do as Kagawa did when the Japanese stood up; he was unsteady on his feet, and began—laughing loudly, to attempt to catch Yoriko, while she eluded him gracefully. Once Kagawa stumbled, and would have fallen if the tiny *geisha* had not caught him. “You’re drunk, Kagawa!” Owen shouted, although he imagined that he spoke very sedately.

“*Hai!* did I not come here to get drunk?” Kagawa yelped, and began his pursuit anew.

The rain beat steadily outside; violent gusts of wind ripped at the thatched roofs. It was good to be here, protected from the storm, with a strange girl secure be-

side him, Owen thought: it was all new, all adventure . . .

The girl Yoriko ran more slowly, and permitted Kagawa to catch up with her; they were near one of the sliding panels of an inside wall, and, as he threw an exulting arm around her shoulders, Kagawa slid the panel back, half-pushed, was half-pulled into the adjacent room, and closed the panel behind him with a little click.

Owen Meissing reached for another cup of *sake*. He should, by every rule of conduct, have reached for Kikuno's hand; he wondered if it were as hot, now, as his own. Instead, he gulped down the drink, licked his lips, tried to say something—anything—and remained silent. Neither did the girl speak. When he was certain that she was not looking at him, he watched her . . . lord, but she was pretty! He wondered how it would be to . . . kiss her . . .

From somewhere deep in the inn another girl played a *samisen*; weird, minor-tuned scraps of song were faintly discernible to his ear. The clatter of a dish. A near giggle. The great bell of the Shinto temple announced the prayer-hour—bong-bong-bong—and, above the rain, he could hear the clacking *geta* of some wayward priest hurrying back.

What was the matter with him, anyhow?

He said, "Kikuno——" and she looked at him, servitude in her eyes. He poured her a cup of *sake*; the touch of her fingers, as he gave it to her, sent a sudden hot shock through him, and made the girl tremble infectiously. The many glasses of rice-wine touched her unpainted cheeks with red, and she was able—will—

ing—to look at Meissing squarely. In his veins ran a hotter liquid than the *sake*—the heady wine of possession. He reached out his hand, wondering if she, like Yoriko, would scramble to her feet inviting pursuit. His eyes suddenly sought out a panel on another wall from that through which Kagawa had gone.

The girl did not rise, nor did she escape his seeking fingers. Instead her own seemed to curl into them, twisting his between her own; her hand was as hot as his.

“Kikuno—” he began again, when the panel opened and Kagawa stuck in his head.

“We are back!” he announced, Yoriko making an echoing giggle behind him. “And what do we find? Two children sitting hand in hand! Of what stuff are you *seiyo-jin* made, Owen-san? *Hai!* We must liven things up again! Yoriko! Pour *sake!* I am like a child myself this night! I have forgotten my troubles, which are many.” He drank the tiny cupful. “There. That is better! What will we do next?”

Meissing had released Kikuno’s hand hastily, although if she had been all Japanese he would have never moved.

“We must have some excitement!” Kagawa continued.

“A game!” Yoriko squealed.

Kagawa echoed that. “A game, yes. We will do some acting, for which I was famous when I was younger—when I was a mere child, for I am not old now!—good!—Owen-san, you are to be a *samurai*. You leave for war. You say farewell to Kikuno, who is to be your sweetheart—in the play, at least! I am

an officer. I come to summon you to join the army. Yoriko is my army, and will beat against a *sake* bottle with my pipe! Is it all understood?"

Owen had often seen elderly, sedate Japanese men play similar games in Yokohama, and had joined in them.

"Now," Kagawa instructed, happy in ordering them about, "you, Owen-san, are a brave soldier. At this moment you look like a priest kept away from his dinner! That is better. A warrior! So! Push out your chest! That is fine! Here"—the *samisen*—"here is your sword! Now, begin!"

Owen strutted up and down the matting, casting fierce glances about him, as if already imbued with the spirit of battle.

Yoriko shrieked with laughter and rice-wine at him, and even Kagawa applauded. Owen stopped, as if hearing some one speak, then nodded sadly and clapped a pantomimic hand to his head; grasped his sword—the *samisen*—and waved it hilariously in the air. His diffidence gone, he was becoming hilarious also, and laughed loudly, although that was not in the part he was supposed to play.

He strode around the room, then made a gesture as if opening a panel, and stepped beside Kikuno. He made a dumb show of explaining to her what had happened, and then opened his arms to her.

The girl was apparently completely under control, restrained. In accordance with the play, she reached out and patted him on the chest, as if commending his valor, patted her own breast significant of the chastity she would keep while he was at war, then stepped to

him for the mimic embrace. She stood close, very demure and cool; the perfume of *ylang-ylang* in her hair swayed up at Owen as he closed his arms lightly about her. The thin silk of her kimono hissed under his fingers, and through it he could feel the warmth of her body, the softness of it, the firmness. They stood an instant so, and, as Owen was about to release her, Kagawa shouted:

"Excellent! Was that not good acting, Yoriko? The restraint was commendable! It is exactly as a man would act if he were leaving his wife! But this is a sweetheart you are leaving, Owen-san! Try it again, and attempt to look as if the duty were less painful, or I will do it for you! Try to——"

"Ask Owen-san to kiss her," Yoriko commanded. "That is the way they say the *seiyō-jin* do, but I have never seen them."

"*Hai!* that was wise! There is something he should understand! You hear us, Owen-san? Kiss her, so we may be instructed, and also so that the game will be full of life——"

Kikuno's eyes, that had been shut, opened slowly, and found the white man's gazing deeply into them, expectantly; her next move was instinctive, utterly un-Japanese. She threw her head back slightly, smiled and held up lips tremulous and half-parted, then veiled her eyes with the long lashes, and reached an arm about Owen's neck, bringing up the other to join it lightly.

Owen bent, and kissed her quickly, gently.

"Ho!" Kagawa snorted. "So *that* is a kiss——" and became silent.

The cool arm of Kikuno seemed suddenly to vivify, to become warm and very tense; the loose kimono sleeve had fallen away, and Owen felt the new pressure with something akin to triumph. He tightened his embrace until he could test the silk of her hair against his bare throat; released her, trying to peer again into her eyes. They were still tightly closed, unwinking, as if she slept deeply, but her face lifted, and this time two pair of lips met and clung together.

"That is better, but I see nothing very remarkable about it," Kagawa shrilled. "However, they seem to find it pleasant, which is the main thing. *Hai!* Owen-san! Prepare for action! The next part of the game is that I arrive at your home to convey you to the field of battle." To Yoriko: "Are you ready, army? Then we will advance with flags flying and swords waving, to . . . horns of Jizo! but I do not believe that we will! They are still at it . . . I believe, Yoriko, that we had better . . . hmm! . . . yes, we had certainly better finish this play elsewhere, for I can see that we have lost two of our cast!"

CHAPTER V

I

O WEN was seized with an intense desire to get out of the little house above Matsuoki where he was bargaining for a double-hundredweight of excellently crinkled crêpe; as he lighted a match and held it to his cigarette he noticed that his hands were shaking: he was no drinker, he had been temperate when he had first seen Kikuno, and now, weeks later, he was the same, nor had he lost his pride in his clear eyes and steady limbs—yet here he was, shaking like a drunkard. He wanted to get out into the open and half rose from the matting, dropping his cigarette. The tiny noise it made set his nerves on edge. He was afraid—but, he asked himself, of what? It was absurd, monstrous; it was like a kind of madness come over him. He was determined to give way to no such nonsense. Just because he was longing to leave this house, his work, he would remain.

He did not know what had come over him, these past few weeks. Suppose he did enjoy seeing Kikuno, of the tea-house of the Purple Plum: what of that? Suppose he loved her: what of that, either? Was he not going to see the last of Matsuoki soon? Hadn't he about completed his business? He refused to admit

that he might have left the village a good week ago, and did not do so because of—Kikuno.

Karl must have figured that Owen wouldn't stay in the same place for more than a day: that was why he hadn't written. He had, true, worried about the non-appearance of mail, but since he had found Kikuno . . . he didn't seem to think of it so often.

He was going back to Yokohama. Alone. Kikuno couldn't expect anything else. That is, he knew, the Japanese part of her couldn't.

The thought of marriage, of anything save leaving Matsuoki whenever he desired, had never occurred to him in exactly that way. He had known, and knew increasingly, that he liked the girl: perhaps his feeling was even stronger. She . . . she intoxicated him.

What worried him the most was that, away, he was wild to return to her. He was content by her side: that was well enough; absent, working, he should have cast her from his thoughts. The vision of the half-white girl intruded into his business. *Geisha* were for idle hours. Vaguely, he believed that Matsuoki restrained him, bound him down, and gave him too much leisure to think about . . . Kikuno.

The uneasiness, as assailed him now, in the village of silk-weavers near Matsuoki, was no new thing. He had arranged (with gold) that Kikuno was to be called to entertain no one save himself. He had paid well—too well—for the privilege: was it not a fact that she had never been wanted by any save himself? He was a fool, a triple-plated ass, to be in such a foment over a *geisha*; he considered grimly that even when he thought of her as such he was lying in his own

mind about it—she was not a dancing-girl, but his sweetheart.

Karl would have laughed about it, unless the brother discovered that the girl bothered Owen at all times; he didn't believe he would ever say anything to Charley about it.

This nonsense was going to stop—now. At once. He would remain in the house where he was, transact his business, and stay the night; he could, later, see the inside of the ancient temple. No, sir, he was not going back to Matsuoki; nothing could happen to Kikuno, and, after the absence, it would be doubly sweet to return. He would finish his business, and get back to Yokohama. High time he did, too.

The sense of impending trouble filled him again. What was the matter with him? nothing! he was going to *stay—right—here—*

With that he stood erect, and, without seeking out the silk-maker to say good-by, left the house rapidly.

The path back to Matsuoki was not often used, the grass was tall upon it; trees on either side interlocked their moss-grown arms above him, shadowing the way. The deep vistas of the wood were glorified by vapors of the sun, gold-flecked; the air was drowsy and vibrant with the humming of swarming bees high in some tree. At a bend in the way, half hidden, he could see the tiles of a curved, serrated double roof rising above the foliage; in a break of the green were terrace-steps, guarded by great porcelain unnamable beasts. A huge butterfly with pinions of fiery color found its way into the cool of the path, and hovered overhead like a painted piece of silk. . . .

It seemed to keep above Meissing: he thought its fluttering wings similar to the moving sleeves of Kikuno's kimono.

As he walked, the long shadows of the evening became one violent darkness, dim and odorous; the straw-yellow light of the sunset faded out, and in spaces between the thinning trees he could see the stars opening their cold bright eyes. They—he and Kikuno—would soon be sitting on the tiny balcony of the Purple Plum; her voice would come to his ears like some far melody through the spaces of the drowsy night, they would drink cool purple Chinese wine, her head would find his shoulder, and then the night grow old and he never know it.

2

He did not stop at his inn, but went directly to the tea-house, intent on easing himself of the feeling of close disaster that suffocated him again. Unmindful, he did not remove his shoes, but stepped directly inside:

"Where is Kikuno?" he demanded of the serving-maid who came pattering to greet him.

She bowed, and drew in her breath politely.

"I will ask the honorable owner of the tea-house," she told him.

Why had she said that? Didn't she *know* where the girl was? Why hadn't she simply said that Kikuno would be summoned for the honorable guest?

The owner was full of grimaces, smirks and protestations.

"For you, this night, Owen-san, we have sent to another village for the best-trained, most handsome girl——"

"I do not want——"

"Understanding of every virtue, and trained by a great *geisha*-trainer of Tokyo, who directs the girls——"

"I want——"

"Who can dance so that the gods peep out and watch, and whose singing causes the Seven Goddesses to become frenzied, and beside themselves with envy——"

"Where is Kikuno?"

"Kikuno? *Maa!* Beside this new girl she is as the stagnant water to the lotus, as a crow to a——"

Owen kept his temper, and said slowly, "I have asked you where Kikuno was."

"You do not want this paragon of all the——"

"I want Kikuno. Where is she?"

The tea-house man scratched his head, then smiled brightly.

"Sick," he said.

"She was well enough last night."

"Yes, she was well enough last night. But to-night she is not well. Her head aches. Her hands tremble. She is fevered. Her eyes are dull. She can not stand without aid——"

"Where is she?" Owen said quickly. "I'll go and see her, if she is as miserable as that."

The tea-house owner saw that he had overdone it, and plunged into an icy pool of explanation, waving his hands:

"No . . . not so terribly sick. Possibly, in my

anxiety, for I like the girl . . . possibly I exaggerated. She is not so terribly sick . . . no . . . just sick. . . ."

Owen looked at the other grimly.

"I think you lie," he said.

"*Hai, seiyo-jin!* I am not accustomed to being spoken to like that! I lie? I never lie. If you wish, I will swear by the golden ball in Kaminari's hand, and by the shriveled arm of Kishiböjin, mother of beggars, that every word I have said is true! As head of my house, and by the respect my children will some day pay my memory, I tell you——"

"Where is she, then?" Owen repeated.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Home," he retorted. "Where else would you have her?"

"In the *geisha*-district? Where all of the girls live, and from where you summon them to the tea-house?"

"Assuredly!"

The word came too fast, and was uttered too vehemently. Owen was positive that the fellow lied.

"On which street, and which house?"

"Which street? It is . . . very hard to find . . . first you go down the street on which your inn is . . . no, I do not believe that I could explain exactly . . ." the tea-house man saw that this was leading him nowhere, and changed his hastily-formed plan: "There is no reason why I should tell you," he said shortly. "Kikuno comes here for you—when we call her. It is not proper for you to see her elsewhere. I am wearied of this argument. As a matter of fact"

—his voice raising—"I am weary of you as well. I am——"

What else he was weary of never found utterance. Meissing reached out a swift hand, drew the Japanese close to him, and clapped his other hand over his mouth, to keep the fellow from squealing for assistance.

"Now, tell me where she is," he demanded.

The other's eyes squinted at him evilly.

"Oh, I'll find a way to make you," Meissing said in English. With a sudden motion he tripped the other, fell over him, his hand still on the Japanese's mouth, and placed his knee in the pit of the fallen man's stomach. Ground it down.

The Japanese bobbed his head, and Owen released his pressure, and also took his hand from off his mouth.

"What—is it—to me?" the tea-house man grunted as best he could. "I am too old—for wrestling matches. If *you* fight, it is something else! Kikuno? Her mother and I have sold her, for many *yen* gold, and so the matter is ended. Let me up."

Meissing did not move.

"To whom?" he said in a whisper.

"To . . . another tea-house."

"You lie again. You have been getting too much money from me to sell her to a tea-house. Now—tell the truth, cow-face. Or——" he made as if to repeat his torture.

"You gave more than she was worth," the Japanese said. "But the other gave more than you—by far. And it was rumored that you were soon to leave Matsuoki for good. I must do the best I can for my-

self. The girl's mother was willing. You informed Kagawa, the inn-keeper, that you would not return to-night, and I decided it was a good time . . ."

"What other?" Meissing muttered.

The Japanese blinked, looked blank, and then hurried to say: "The old *seiyo-jin*."

Owen licked his lips.

"What is—his name?"

"He did not tell me. We called him the 'bearded one.'"

Meissing stood erect. His eyes, now, were as evil as the Japanese's had been before, and the other shrank from him. Somewhere he had heard that white men do not strike enemies who are prone, and so he did not move from the matting.

"Have . . . they . . . left Matsuoki?"

The Japanese changed the "yes" he was about to utter to a negative.

"Where are they?"

The Japanese made the best of what he had. "I spoke the truth, Owen-san. She—they, that is—are where Kikuno's mother lives. Outside of Matsuoki. To the north. In the *eta* village. The outcast place, where the pariahs live. For some reason the bearded one—who remained in the inn when he was at Matsuoki before—came to the *eta* village this morning. And saw Kikuno. And came to me, after speaking to the mother. There is the story."

"Are they still there?"

"The *seiyo-jin* said that he would leave in the morning for the mountains, taking Kikuno . . . yes, they are still there. . . ."

3

There is usually nothing to arise for in an *eta* village. Awakening, you know yourself hungry, and hungering may seldom eat. If there be millet or rice, where the charcoal with which to cook? And having means of fire, who can keep the rats and mice and white-ants from the treasured grains? It is better—having a precious *sen* or two—to go into the village of Matsuoki itself, and fill with hot *soba* at a buckwheat shop. Or to think of the delightfulness of coming food, of an extended stomach, and so doze through the day until the hour for the evening meal.

On the evening that Meissing had returned to Matsuoki, a street in the *eta* village—Way of the Chaste River, but this has fallen into disrepute by very non-usage, since the water is sopped up for the cooking-pots by the people of Matsuoki many streets below—was at last awake, and had come to life with a leap rather than yawning and stretching. And scratching. The street was never lovely, but never so unlovely as at this hour of final rising. Being where it was, in an *eta* village—place of pariahs, unapproachable outcasts, some of whom are *samurai* descendants who preferred hours of life to eternal fame—and what it was—the dimmest, dreariest way in the village, mudwalled huts crowding into a six-foot passage; walls perforated with holes, although mud of an unbelievable stickiness was heavy in the street for the scooping—little was made, less sold, and work unthought of. Talk, even, was often discarded as requiring too great an effort. Talk of everything save food.

Even at this hour men and women usually kenneled in their huts, awaiting black night before leaving. Now they crowded into the street, ringed about by that concrete evidence of idleness, children.

Kimonos hung from housetop to housetop to dry. Ancient heaps of refuse marked every door, ill-smelling in the hot night air. Never a banneret-zigzagged strip of paper before an open panel, nor lantern, nor any of the ordinary village customs, yet the *eta* village, and especially the Way of the Chaste River, was expectant, undeniably awake, alert: was not the bearded *seiyo-jin* to take Kikuno for his wife—to take her, at all events, even if honor did not enter into the matter—and had Kikuno's mother not insisted, as part of the purchase price, that there was to be much food . . . and drink?

Hai! but there would be swollen bellies that night!

In one of the huts along the Way of the Chaste River the *geisha*, Kikuno, made a strange figure. Among her own people, and with Meissing not by her, she seemed taller, and, against their dumpiness, supplely slender. The matting on the hut's earthen floor was ragged, mere shreds of straw, and of the same color as the earth beneath. In a corner of the room she seemed to grow out of the dirt beneath lotos-like; her black hair was interwoven with creamy blossoms; her robes of pale silk—a gift from one of the other tea-house *geisha*—took shifting tints when she moved slightly, as vapors change hue with the changing of the light. A deathly quiet pervaded the hut, and Kikuno's mother broke it with: "She is dressed and ready. Make the last payment."

Her voice was directed to a dark corner, toward which Kikuno's back was turned. The girl's face was white as paper, and as lifeless. A finger she might move, or an eyelash flicker, but these were the only indication that she was not an unwound automaton; she gave no sign that she had heard her mother speak.

The man in the dark corner stood erect, or as nearly erect as he might. He, also, seemed lifeless, and very old; his face was latakia-hued, leathery, wrinkled, and singularly expressionless—all save the eyes, which burned at the girl as if, through them, he might absorb her youth, and become young himself. Additional venom made his eyes hot: he was, so he figured, taking from one of the dam' Meissings, who had hounded him—more in imagination than in reality—from village to village. Was he a fool, that he did not know what this young Meissing was up to? Had he not read the letter sent this Owen? All this talk in the villages of buying silk was to make him careless. He knew! Well, in addition to getting this half-breed—he was sick of Japanese!—he had the double joy of knowing that he struck indirectly at Owen Meissing. He, Phillips, had been very lucky. He had enough minted gold to go far into the mountains, where the other white man could never find him, and take this little thing with him, to assuage his loneliness. If there had not been talk in the village he might never have persuaded Kikuno's mother into selling the girl; he was able to emphasize the fact that Owen Meissing was going to leave Matsuoki soon—and then the mother would starve again . . . and it had worked!

Better, he had done all of it in a day, while Meissing had been absent!

He looked at Kikuno. She wasn't short, stubby, like the Japanese. That kimono surely concealed long graceful limbs, sweet curves. . . .

"Come to me!" he commanded.

Kikuno pivoted slowly, and, as if drawn by strings, approached him puppet-like.

He put out his hand, grasping the rounded forearm, and pushing up the kimono sleeve as he did so.

"Final payment!" the mother rasped.

Phillips nodded. "It comes. I have given orders to the fried-fish and horse-meat shop that they are to bring as much as all of you can eat." He shook off the interruption, and cupped Kikuno's elbow with his wrinkled paw. "Now, little one," he said—and stopped.

Footsteps, running: a coolie bursting into the barren room, shouting his message as he came through the door:

"The big young *seiyō-jin*! He is back. Moraga, the owner of the tea-house, told me. To come to you, and so inform you. I have run all the way, coming up the back streets. And up the river-bed. The other *seiyō-jin* comes fast on his long legs. He is angered. That was the message."

The coolie followed the advice of the tea-house man, and ran out of the hut again. Something, Moraga had told him, something was going to happen, and he did not want one of his coolies about. The *eta*, in the Way of the Chaste River, sensed some violation of their promised feast, and came close about Kikuno's

hut. They peered in, making use of the *shoji's* holes, and shrank from what they saw.

Phillips was shuddering in a cold stare; he leaned against the wall; once he moved and wiped his forehead. As they watched him, an eye at every tear in the screen, he set about a peculiar business. Whatever he was about—and he seemed to be acting a part with consciousness—he did with extraordinary care, down to the discarding of his *seiyo-jin* coat, and ascertaining by a few wide swinging gestures that the dirty shirt beneath gave free play to his arms. Pulled off his shoes, and stepped softly about, as if trying the foothold to be obtained; removed the matting, over which he might trip.

Lastly, he took from inside his trousers leg a long and double-edged knife.

He felt its temper, and as he did so moistened his lips, his fists worked open and shut, as if he considered trusting to them rather than to the blade, but he made no move to replace the knife in its former hiding-place.

The *eta* wondered at his strange tongue: "I will settle this now," he had said, in English. "I will repay these Meissings for hounding me!"

Then he spoke rapidly, in a low tone, to Kikuno's frightened mother. She must explain to the *eta* that if the *seiyo-jin* came, and left with Kikuno, that there would be no feast, no drinking, no anything. They must be like the monkeys: see nothing, hear nothing, and, above all, *say* nothing of what might occur. When she explained this to them he stood at the door with her, and made a significant gesture with his long knife.

A shiver of appreciation went through the *eta* like wind in the reeds; every man, and every woman, trembled with ecstatic expectation. It was going to be better than a show, any hour of the eight! And, on top of it all, food! The *eta* hissed agreement, and kenneled in their holes again, every eye on the hut where the comedy was to be enacted for their benefit.

Back in the room of the hut, Phillips directed that Kikuno sit—no, stand, that she not ruin her kimono, where Meissing would see her immediately he entered. The mother was to get out of the hut entirely. This done, he made a final sweep of the room with unquiet eyes, and took up a position near the door.

The *eta* cursed the intruding *seiyo-jin*, the big young one, for attempting to stop the food that the bearded one had ordered, curses in which Meissing, his forbears and descendants, were heavily involved. Suppose the bearded one had not been warned? As it was, all would be satisfactory, and the ensuing play enacted as a whet for their appetites. The young white fool would come, and find the old spider waiting for him—and after that little affair had been consummated, there would be pans of boiling fish, and rice, and steaming horse-meat, and mugs and mugs of sticky, malty *beeru*:

“We will eat,” a *geta*-mender proclaimed joyously, “until we burs——”

He got no further, and the *s* hung in the air until all of his breath had hissed through his teeth. The ragged clog-repairer had seen Owen Meissing threading his way up the jagged street of the *eta* village. Who saw him next was never known, although the secondary honor was claimed by many; possibly all

saw him at the self-same instant, for the indrawn breath of all whistled the last sibilant sound into being again.

Phillips needed no other warning. He stood close to the door, against the wall, clenching the haft of his knife desperately; waited spiderwise, his tongue moistening dry, fevered lips.

4

Meissing, hurrying toward the *eta* village, had been preyed upon by cross-tides of intent. He felt that he was playing a fool's part in interfering, and he had believed, and believed now, Kikuno's protestations of affection. They were, he remembered, more than that; they had been voluntary, natural: she must have been forced into this miserable business. Her mother, her only parent, was in position to command, and the daughter was compelled to obey. That was Japanese law. The thought of her innocent sweetness encompassed by Phillips—he was deadly certain the old man was Phillips—sickened him: it reminded him of the ancient ape on the *China*, when Charley and he had come over to the Orient for the first time. That Phillips might take this action to infuriate a Meissing never occurred to him.

What he would do, if he found Kikuno and Phillips, he did not know. To "take it out of his hide," as dad had asked, was obviously impossible. He could not fight with a man of Phillips' years. The thing to do (he thought as he trotted toward the *eta* village) was

to tongue-lash the old reprobate, and—if he became offensive thereat—pull his goat-beard. As for Kikuno . . . the vision of her rose and tormented him . . . he was thinking too much about her. He needed action! Well, maybe he was going to get it. As for Kikuno . . . he didn't know what he was going to do, or exactly what his feeling toward her was . . . he mustn't think about that now. There would be time enough, after. . . .

He reached the little footbridge which crosses the barren river of the virtuous name, and separates the *eta* from the village of Matsuoki. The bridge was gay with paper-flowers and ideograph-inscribed petitions from members of the Matsuoki community, indited to Kishiböjin—not that the poor be freed from their torment, but that they, the comfortable, be withheld from ever being forced to a similar place. He quickened his pace now, breaking into a run; it would be horrible to come so close, and then to miss them. He saw no one to ask the way of, every crooked path, every narrow street, echoed only silence and his own footbeats; he went the faster for that. He ran at last—for every alley came to it finally—into the street of the Chaste River, and looked swiftly down its emptiness.

He knew, by reputation, the *eta*. Pariahs, street-coolies, *geta*-menders who had learned their trade in jail, sweepers of the temple. He hesitated a moment, then, fastening his eyes on a hut a bit more solid than its neighbors, started toward it, to inquire the way to Kikuno's place of living.

The *eta* were no more able to resist following him

now than they could resist scratching. Had they not been waiting for this? Talked of it? Conjectured upon the exact spot the bearded *seiyo-jin* would knife this young one? Were not several *rin* wagered—future coppers, and not to hand, but did that make the betting less intense?—as to whether the foreigner's blood would be red, black, or white?

Meissing became sensate of what was at his back, and walked more slowly. *Eta*, forgetful of Phillips' command, tumbled rat-like from their holes, and made a way for him to the door of one hut. The white man attempted to appear unconscious; he whistled shrilly some scrap of tune, then, as if this spurred him, took the remaining steps forward to the door of the hut swiftly, never glancing at the cortège in his rear, nor to either side.

He pushed the door open, and called:

"Kikuno!"

His shove had been ineffectual, the door had opened half, but now it swung wide.

Before him he could see the girl, and there came to him the happy thought that he was in time.

"Kikuno!" he called again.

She did not turn, nor move. The silk of her kimono seemed to rustle slightly, but that—his eyes told him—was all. Had he been watching anything save the pallor of her face, the wide frightened eyes which told him nothing, he would have seen that with her hand she made a motion for him to hold back. Instead, he started through the door, while an expectant hiss, like the sound of a breaking wave, ran up behind him. What happened next came too fast for the eye.

Kikuno's sleeves moved like the wings of a giant butterfly, and she swept forward so rapidly that Meissing had barely time to open his arms to her; she settled into them with a strange little sobbing sigh, and he thought, from her sudden limpness, that she had fainted. . . .

Phillips' descending knife—he had eyes for no one, nothing, save Meissing—had plunged into her side as she fluttered to Owen; he had not seen her advance, nor, if he had, could he have checked the point of his long weapon. Owen bent over her, whispering her name, telling her that all was well, and felt her body half jerked from him: looked in the direction of this queer movement, and saw Phillips, wild with rage, with frustration, attempting to withdraw his blade and finish the work so poorly begun.

The man's face was horrible, distorted; spume from his lips stuck to his beard and silvered it.

What had happened was still unclear to Owen. As he bent, his back still to the open door, to deposit Kikuno to the floor, the knife left its lovely sheath, and Phillips sprang forward over the stooping, burdened Meissing; lifted his knife high again, and swooped forward, intending to drop on the other's back and make the blow doubly certain. In that instant an *eta*, half fearful of the possible result, now that the big young *seiyo-jin* was still alive and eager for conflict—preparing for it, since he was releasing the girl—unseeing of Phillips' jump from behind the door, flung his knife at Meissing's back.

It took Phillips squarely under the stabbing arm, and he tumbled over Owen.

Meissing squirmed about, and brought his arms around Phillips.

"Now I'll take it out of your hide, you murderer!" he whispered. "I'll take it out of your hide! I'll . . ." he dropped Phillips, knowing that what he had was a shell, withered and drained of life, although he did not know, yet, how.

Kikuno's pale kimono blossomed a new crimson splotch of flower—that grew faster than even the tree-peony it resembled—on her left side; he lifted her, first whispering, then calling her name: he thought that her eyelids flickered, that she attempted valiantly to smile, but of this he was never certain.

The limp burden still in his arms, he stood up, dizzied and horribly sick. He did not know where to go, nor what to do. At the doorway, and into the narrow stinking street to the far row of mud huts, *eta* blocked his path. They did not need the screams of Kikuno's mother to goad them. See what the *seiyo-jin* (she shrieked) had done between them! killed her baby Kikuno! They could know (and she told them) that the promised feast was gone, for who was there now to pay? Would this young foreigner? 'After what had happened? Never in the world!

Owen stepped to the door, no trickling of plan in his head. He realized dimly that the *eta* did not look friendly.

How unfriendly they were was impressed upon him the instant he was out of the hut, for they were all over him at once.

He struck out with his left arm, holding his burden to him with the other; struck once, twice, and then,

the *geisha's* body torn from him, went down. The very pack on top of him was saving; feet found his face, hands choked at him, but there was never room enough to ply a knife. The rabble behind pressed forward, and added their weight bravely to the heap. The stench of unwashed bodies became loathsome. Once he snarled defiance, and then everything went blacker than even the press of bodies above him could possibly have made.

The *eta* on the far edge of the piled-up mass of furious arms and legs heard the new sound first: a tinny bell—ting-ting-ting; it meant only one thing, and that food. Boys from the eating-shop, with a half-dozen armed and stalwart coolies accompanying them. As if by magic the tinkle penetrated to the innermost Japanese, and Meissing was freed of the weight of a half-hundred bodies.

A new notion came to the *eta*. Perhaps this *seiyo-jin* had, in his torn clothes, gold! Eager fingers searched for it, and did find a minted roll. Paper currency they had no interest in, for it meant and represented nothing; the searchers did not even draw it from Meissing's pocket. But gold meant food!

They were too wise, and too cowardly, to attempt rushing the coolies who brought the food: would there not be revenge in such case, not only from the police, but also from the coolies' families? A white man—two, for that matter—was very different, and of no importance. *Hai!* the affair would never get beyond the boundaries of the pariah village! The old one they would bury, and also what remained of Kikuno,

and also the young one—and there you were! Who would know?

The last *eta* to get off Meissing's prostrate body was told to finish him off; this one wailed after the off-rushing horde that he was very poor, not a *geta*-mender, and had no knife; none stopped to give him one, and he cast about for a rock with which to finish the business intrusted to him. The smell of the food assailed his nostrils; he looked down at the white man, decided swiftly that he could return and send the fellow to what gods he had later, and, howling that something be saved for him, clattered after his companions.

Meissing's eyes staggered open, one after the other. His face was gray as ash, and he was covered with the thick dust of the Way of the Chaste River. He seemed to become conscious all at once, aware of himself, of what had passed: he was very wan and thin at the lips, his eyes were preternaturally old and wise—gleamed with dormant wickedness and fury, and yet were strangely sad. He did not attempt to reach his feet, nor could he, but crawled off, at once beaten utterly and unconquered, through the heavy dust and puddles of mud-and-ooze.

He reached the bridge into Matsuoki at last, and came, with its rail as support, to his feet.

On his slow way to the inn he passed the great gates of the temple, seeming to lift wings to the sky. The temple-door was open, and permitted him to glimpse the gilded Sun-Goddess and, before her, Yatagarasu, the eight-handed crow who is provided as her messenger and attendant, with his bloody red beak

and velvet-black body; priests told their beads evenly, clicking in unison: "Here—*here* is purity!"

He would not wait, he thought bitterly now, to do anything more in Matsuoki. He was done. Finished. If the night boat, that stopped at every thatched shed, had not gone he would take it . . . he could not wait until the next day . . . he *would* not stay in Matsuoki . . . the sense of irreparable loss overwhelmed him . . . he wanted, suddenly, to get back to Karl, although he knew, even now, that he could never speak of . . . all this . . . to any one. The miserable idea came to him that possibly something had happened to Karl: that was why he, Owen, had heard nothing. He walked faster. He must get out, get back to Yokohama. Quickly.

Ghostly stone lanterns, fantastic candle-flame trees, sent shadows after him, fantastically, on this last walk of Owen Meissing through the moonlit streets and paths of Matsuoki, shadows that would accompany him—in vision—along other streets of other cities, whether lighted or dark, and, with them, the final litany-like chanting from the Shinto temple, nasal, loud: "Here is purity . . . purity . . . purity. . . ."

CHAPTER VI

I

WHEN Karl Meissing's steamer reached Yokohama the business of K. & O. Meissing was going on calmly and placidly. Owen had, on his return, welcomed the accumulation of work gratefully. That his father had died, and he had not known, was like the application of salt on an already open wound: he became, at first, furious that he had not been told, and then settled stolidly to work; he was, the boys in the store decided, very much changed; he seemed both more sedate, cool, and also quickly able to fly into a passion over trifles. From the puffed eye and scratched face—*eta* marks as remembrance—the boys believed that Mr. Owen had been on one long wild time, one—wild—time.

The brothers met at the store: Owen did not feel like talking to Karl any place else; in the store, at the little office to the rear.

"Hello, Owen!" Karl said.

Owen smiled. "Hello, Charley," he echoed.

They looked at each other.

"You look like you'd been working," Karl said judicially.

His brother nodded. "How's *Mutter*?" he asked evenly. "She take it kind of hard?"

"Yes. Kind of. Pretty good now, though. Say, Owen, where you been all the time? We tried——"

Owen waved his arm vaguely. "All around," he said. "All around. I cabled home when I got back from the interior." Then, "Where's Ruth? I heard you got married—when I came back to Yokohama. She—she all right?"

"Ruth? Fine . . . fine. She asked to be remembered to—Uncle Owen!"

"What? Why . . ."

"Oh, not yet, of course. But pretty soon. She stayed in 'Frisco. Uncle Owen! Sounds kind of funny." Owen did not reply, and Charley went on: "How's business?"

"Rotten."

Karl nodded. Neither he nor Owen ever admitted that it was anything else. "Anything—new?" he asked.

"Nothing new. No. Nothing exciting. . . ."

He knew that his living in Yokohama was existence in a horrible city of roaring emptiness; he was amazed and horrified by the power and intensity of the love within him. In this moment he knew it—knew the memory of Kikuno—for an undying thing; nothing could kill it, not even an act of his own. The purity of this love could not be suffocated, even satiety of the flesh could not lessen his yearning, ever. Fiercely, he had tried to keep the thought of Kikuno, in her pale robes, from him, but knew now that he could not.

"Nothing new," he repeated slowly. "You eat on the boat? Well, it's time, then; come along. How'd you come out with that agency we always wanted?"

Get a chance to see the people when you were home? And—I forgot to ask—how’s Minnie?” Then, again, as if the former protestation had not been enough, “Nothing new here, Charley. Dead as hell.”

Charley wondered.

While they ate Charley told bits of news of home, of their mother, of old business associates, of a contract he had signed for typewriters, and, finally: “Who you think I bumped into, down on the Jackson-Street wharf, before I left? John Middleton! Yes, sir, old Owen’s son. Dad’s old partner, up at the mine. He’s raising spuds up the Sacramento. Grown to be a spud himself, I guess. I offered him the money dad had in the safe-deposit, but all he wanted was the interest. Had me invest it in bonds. Fellow was a good sort, but guess working in the fields and trying to get any kind of help has taken all of the spunk out of him. He looked—you know how the spud-growers look, when they’re trying to get started. Say, remember you wrote me—I got the letter in ’Frisco—you wrote me something about that old skunk Phillips? Ever get a chance to take it out of his hide, like dad wanted?”

“No.”

“Well, maybe some day we’ll run into him, although I don’t see how we can lick an old man——”

“No—you won’t run into him, Charley.”

Karl looked quickly at his brother. So, he imagined, that was it!

“He . . . dead, Owen?”

“Yes.”

The brother could not keep back another question.

“You . . . did you . . .”

"I didn't—get the chance, Charley. I—I guess I would have, if I could. Somebody else—a Jap—took it out of his hide. A knife. God! . . ." harshly—"What kind of bonds you buy, Karl?"

2

The brothers plunged into the work before them earnestly: Karl was working, happily, for Ruth and the expected newcomer; Owen worked heavily and with apparent whole-hearted concentration; as Karl wrote home, in tremendous detail, to Ruth, so his brother began, at first ineptly, then more fluently, to write his mother. It gave him, although he did not consider it as such, a definite, tightening bond to home, to the States; he never mentioned that which touched him closely, but of little scraps of business, of a dinner here, of Sunday tennis, of a wild trip through the Inland Sea to Nagasaki, he elaborated on. Of, also, what he was going to do when he came back, although Charley really ought to go, and bring Ruth back with him pretty soon; how his mother must cook him noodle-soup every night, and roast a goose with stuffing (she mustn't think they did not get enough to eat, for they had a good Chino boy as cook, but it was not like *her* cooking), and, please, have some good claret in the house for him . . . with things like this he concealed, successfully, utterly, that which he would have liked to write. Of his weariness, his lonesomeness, of Kikuno of the silky hair.

His mother became a vivid, actual personality to him now, where before she had been merely his

mother. Her answering letters, always in English, but with angular German slants to the letters, were keen and concise; and always, strongly, gave him the feeling that here was an impregnable fortress to which he might, in need, retire, and find hospitable, protecting, walls. For herself she asked, and wanted, nothing; Owen might, though, find some pongee for Minnie and bring it with him. It would be nice, too, if he sent something from Japan to the cousins at Christmas-time, that is, if it would not be too much trouble.

If Marianna Meissing was sensate that Owen was troubled she mentioned nothing of it. Aware of the uneasiness, the restlessness, that had been a part of Johann, her husband, and a heritage of her boys, she did wonder if Owen was afflicted with desire to move, to see new things; she it was who suggested—after Ruth, with her two-months-old boy-babe, and a nurse (Ruth said that it was Owen's turn to come home, and that she had never been seasick in her life, and that she was going to cable Karl when it was too late for him to object!) had crossed the Pacific and was busy watching a new house grow in the high hills above Yokohama—that Owen, instead of coming directly home, go by way of Suez. That (she wrote insistently) he needed a vacation, and, home, would never take it, but do as Charley did, and run about with his old friends, instead of sleeping late and going to bed by ten.

There wasn't one single reason, Karl agreed, why Owen shouldn't; Ruth, also, thought it would be lovely. She was very busy, with a new baby and a new house to dress; busy seeing that the Chino took

no more than his proper "squeeze" out of the food-purchasing money, busy planning dinners for their friends, and Sunday-tennis, with the little son, Alan, as the true attraction that she offered her guests. Owen suggested his plan to Ruth first: suppose he . . . did she, Ruth, think that mother would like it if he were to ask her—she might take Minnie along, too—ask her to meet him somewhere in Europe, maybe, and then they could sightsee a little, and then go on home? Ruth giggled that he wasn't very coherent, and did he mean *she* or Mother Meissing? and then added swiftly that he was a dear to think of that! Of course Mother Meissing would be delighted; she had, Ruth said, often spoken of going back to Wittelshofen, and seeing the place, and her relatives—one of them Owen's uncle—again. He was a dear boy to suggest it, and now he must write and tell mother. . . .

Nothing impressed itself upon Owen, in the subsequent trip, as did the wonderfulness of this mother of his. Why, she wasn't any older now than when he'd been a kid! All of the pent-up affection in him he poured out to her, and much to Minnie, who had accompanied her.

He pleased her especially by remembering enough German to speak with the curious relatives in their old-country dress, and never (in their presence) to laugh at them.

"Suppose," he said once, "that dad hadn't beaten it out of this dump. You'd be wearing a shawl and one of those black balloon skirts, and I'd probably be the village butcher or something! Dad had the idea, *Mutter!*"

She smiled at the vision, very proud of this tall son of hers, whom the people of Wittelshofen looked up to as the Rich *Amerikaner*, and who carried these honors so easily. It was—Wittelshofen believed—an unparalleled event to see him order beer for a crowd, and never count the change, or even leave some of the copper *Pfennige* on the table! *Ach du Lieber*, Marianna's sisters whispered one to the other, the luck of Marianna to have gone to America, to marry Johann Meissing, and to have such wealthy boys: they were full of plans for Owen, and various distant relatives of their husbands were trotted before Owen, with deadly intent.

Owen teased his mother about it:

"That nice fat one, how would you like to have her for a daughter-in-law? They say she makes the best cake in town!" And again, "If I take the yellow-haired beauty, I'll inherit the hide business of Wittelshofen, and that is certainly an inducement, *Mutter!*"

Marianna laughed with him. The very thought of her Owen, married, was silly. Karl was different; it was good for Karl. Owen was, now more than when he had been younger, very much her baby.

While Owen listened placidly, she lectured him for a full five minutes because he had lent money to relatives who, in his opinion, needed it: did he think he was banker to all Germany? did he ever expect to get a single *Pfennig* back? while she was secretly pleased. Owen admitted that he had no expectations of a return, but offered as excuse that it was fun listening to the promises that were made.

"You are too easy," Marianna insisted.

"Seems like I heard something about that Cousin Teresa—or whatever that woman's name was—about sending a few of her children to the States for an American education, and then that we'd see them started in business, at something or other," Owen said suavely. "Now, *I* didn't promise them that, and I'll bet Minnie didn't—did you, sis?—so it kind of puts the blame on your shoulders, *Mutter*. How 'bout it?"

"Well, I just said——"

"Oh! So you said something, did you?"

"What can a boy, or girl, do in Wittelshofen? And I told Cousin Teresa I would talk to you——"

"Story I heard was that it was all fixed for the kids to come in a year or so."

"Well . . . maybe I . . ."

"Stop teasing mama," Minnie came to the older woman's aid.

"Teasing? Who's teasing? You can tell a Meising a mile away by the beak, and now we'll have a whole tribe of them in 'Frisco. It's serious, I tell you. I'll never hear the end of it. I'm ashamed of you, *Mutter!* Why'd you ask 'em, anyhow?"

"I didn't ask, Owen. Teresa . . . hinted. And . . . so . . ."

"That's what they all did about the money. Hinted. We're a bunch of American suckers, that's what we are. We're easy. Dead easy, that's what's the matter with us. They just played us for easy marks."

"I did it—because I wanted to," Marianna said sharply. "It will do those children good to get away, and——"

"That's why I did what I did, about the money,"

Owen interrupted. "I'm not blind: they needed it. They've been treating us like lords, even if they stuff us as full as goats, when they don't know, after we're gone, how they'll eat for a month. Don't you lecture me, though, *Mutter*. If we're suckers, it's because we want to be, isn't it?"

Marianna smiled at him, although all she said was: "*Ja!*"

When they were leaving Wittelshofen, uncomfortable from a huge family-dinner, with all of Marianna's relatives and theirs as well to see them off, Owen said: "Now I can understand how dad must have felt when he got away from here. Even these few days of it have driven me crazy. No wonder men want to leave the old country."

He bowed elaborately to every girl, making Marianna and Minnie smile, and even threw a kiss—when he was safe on the little puffing train, and it started—impartially to the women on the board platform.

"Now we'll see if Muenchener beer is as good as they say it is," he said, making himself as comfortable as he could on the stiff seat of the car.

"You always think the beer in the *next* town will be better," Minnie remarked.

"Sure," Owen agreed. "It always will be."

"That's because——" his sister began.

Marianna cut her short.

"*Ja!*" complacently. "It is in Owen as it was in Johann. And there was no better man than——"

Minnie: "But poor papa *had* to leave——"

"So does Owen have to leave. To go. He gets tired of the same thing. But papa settled down, after

he had seen a lot——” she looked hopefully up at Owen.

“If you promise to do the cooking, *Mutter*, I’ll become a model citizen some day,” he said gaily.

He did not feel gay. His eyes sobered; true, as his mother said, he *did* have to go, to escape (as she did not understand, and he might not tell her) from himself. He wondered what he would do when he was back in the Orient, if the vision of Kikuno would dim and burn out. He knew that it never would. The pale kimono, the spreading carmine peony blossoming on the silk . . . the shadows of the stone lanterns and the chanting black-robed priests. . . .

No suggestion of this came as he said, “Mother’s right, Minnie. Karl and I can’t help the way we are.”

Minnie sniffed.

“You are hopelessly behind the times, Owen. I read an article, home, and it said that there was absolutely nothing in heredity——”

“Written by some old-maid school-teacher, I’ll bet, who will never get the chance to see her kids ‘heredite’ anything,” her brother said, smiling broadly.

“Look at John Middleton,” she protested. “He is married, and they’ve got a sweet little baby girl—you know, of course, about her, from what mama and I’ve said; her name’s Roberta-Ann, but did I tell you what Karl said, Owen, about his boy and Mr. Middleton’s girl, before they even knew *what* they were going to have, and with Ruth right in the room! Well, you can guess what it was!—He’s married, and he works hard up on his ranch, and hardly even comes down to San

Francisco. Neither he nor his wife have seen a show, or anything, although, with the money papa kept for him, they could . . . *his* father was like papa, but he stays up on his ranch, with the potatoes——”

Owen roared with real laughter.

“Oh, Minnie! With the potatoes!”

“You can laugh——”

“Will you please to walk this polka with me, little potato?” Owen mocked. More seriously, “Wait until you see what he does before you use him as an example, Minnie. Those old ones are the worst. Maybe he will run off with some lady potato, or with the district school-teacher——”

“He won’t, Owen! You’re awfully silly to-day. Mr. Middleton is just as sober and quiet——”

Minnie’s voice had risen.

The mother said softly, “Now, now, children!”

“Just the same, I’ll bet he bu’sts out some day, Min. He’s got it in him. Look at Charley and me. We were discontented. We didn’t know what we wanted——”

“You were both pretty wild,” Minnie murmured.

“Were we? Anyhow, there was something new before us . . . and you can’t say that we haven’t——”

“You have been good boys,” Marianna said, more to herself than to him.

“The article was written by a man,” Minnie insisted. “And, Mr. Know-it-all, it said——”

“To live with the potatoes—that’s what she said, didn’t she, *Mutter?*”

Minnie refused to argue, and looked steadily out of the window, maintaining a discreet and frosty silence.

"I know this much," Owen continued; "if Middleton feels like Charley and I did, he'll jump out of the rows of spuds sooner or later, when he's sick of spraying potato-bugs."

"He will not," Minnie said coldly. "He told us that he felt he was a part of the land, and that he was perfectly contented with——"

"If he doesn't, his kid will."

"Girls are very different, Owen. They aren't like boys."

"Say, sis, if you knew——"

"You know absolutely nothing about girls," Minnie pronounced didactically. "But you're like all the rest of the bachelors. You *think* you know everything. If you are so awfully wise——"

Marianna saw a danger-signal in her boy's tightening mouth. *Ach*, they were children still. . . . "Now, now, Minnie! Owen!" she said, as she had many years ago; if Karl had been with them, his name would have been added, she felt, and all three would have been arguing together on something like this, which amounted to, and was, nothing. She smiled as she spoke, and patted a hand of each.

BOOK THREE
CAPTIVE LIGHTNING

CHAPTER I

I

THE valleys of California, north of San Francisco and north of Tamalpais, have been generously dealt with by the Supreme Architect (Who, alone among craftsmen, knows when to give and when to stay the rein); they are abundantly watered by swift torrents, not stinted of deep redwood shade nor removed too far from the timely stroke of the sun: man, who has it not in him to be thrifty in so prodigal a midst, has also thought it lawful to go free. Out of a lake of rustling leaves, in the broadest of these valleys, rise, like the masts of ships crowding a port, church-towers, the belfries of the old convent, the domes of the city and county buildings; in the middle of the day the domes bubble silver.

This town, at the head of a sun-steeped marsh, has several bonds to the saint for whom it was named; there is, first the church of San Rafael Arcangel (restored, but not to its original form), a Spanish pageant every third year or so, and numerous boys and men bearing the patron saint's name—Rafael.

San Rafael, then, is a town set on meadows and encompassed upon three sides by hills (on the fourth is the marsh); its streets are like cloister-walks, shaded with maple and cork-elm; its people are the same as

any to the north or south—at the mercy of any head but the aggregate's, pack-mules to a notion, galley slaves of a whim, driven hither and thither in a herd, like restless leaves, at the will of self-appointed (although duly elected) town officials. It is a place of colors: brown, yellow, and warm white, and every eave and twig is printed sharply on a sky of morning blue. Blue? The color, rather, of San Francisco Bay when a fleeting cloud spreads a curtain of hyacinth over the sheeted turquoise bed.

It is a town full of sleep; in the lazy winter dawn even the smoke from cypress-logged fireplaces seems to stretch itself upon emerging from the red-brick chimneys; the very perfume of rain-drenched laurel and harlequin madrone is productive of nothing save slumber.

Marianna—Grandmother Meissing, now, to her children, relatives, friends and grandchild alike—selected San Rafael to live in after the earthquake and subsequent disastrous fire of 1906; the old house on California Street was still immaculate behind the Corinthian columns and impeccable calla-lilies, as were the other houses along the street, but on Pine, to the south, the encroaching Japanese lodging-houses and grocery stores had already a foothold; shopping on Fillmore Street was no longer possible—these arguments Marianna advanced, never admitting (what Minnie had claimed for years) that the house was too large, the ceilings atrociously high, for two women and a boy to live in. She had an income from the Orient business; there was no reason why she should not do with it as she desired. Minnie lived with her mother now;

her husband, struck by the fear of illness he had for his wife, had melted away: to mother and daughter Karl and Ruth sent Alan, their boy, for his schooling. In the city it had been terrible; street-cars and wagons, and those smelling automobiles whose brakes, immature, refused to hold on the steep hills. . . .

The town of San Rafael was selected by Marianna and Minnie after due conference; it was quiet, and Marianna found she wanted that: she could have a garden, on a piece of land large enough so that she might dig in it, and, with an old apron over a dress, in comfortable bulging shoes, plant with no one to tell her that the neighbors were watching. Best of all, it would be an excellent place for Alan to go to school. In six months a brown house of many wide porches was built, after a plan decided on by Minnie and corrected by Marianna, a house protected from the street by pine-trees over eighty feet high, the branches interlacing in all but one spot, through which the bay might be seen, and Richmond on the far side.

Marianna laid out the garden: it was to be a garden that she herself could tend; before the house, a rose-plot—bright jacqueminots and La France from the city's best nursery together with clippings from various neighborhood gardens; in this triangular bed were several shrubs: a double lilac whose blossoms were more blue than true lilac-color, a holly-tree, a flowering-peach; into this bed Marianna would transplant everything that seeded itself in the other beds—hollyhock here, canterbury bells there, prolific larkspur wherever space permitted. She was forced to hire a man to do the digging, but always, when he came, explained to

Minnie that some day Owen—and Karl—would do that; it would be good for them. To the right of the house was the orchard, mere seedlings as yet: fig, nectarine, peach (which scaly-leaf always infected), apricot, apple, cherry, a row of black walnut; against the house wistaria, honeysuckle, and, northward, Minnie's precious rock fernery, the rocks of which she collected along with the ferns from the near hills. Marianna laughed at this spot, but (if Minnie were not around) took visitors from the city to see it with a boastingly triumphant air, invariably asking them if they had ever seen a finer.

Karl and Ruth would, some day, come to the house—there were rooms in it enough—and Owen; then, Marianna knew, she would be utterly content. It was not that she was lonesome—how could any woman with a house and family to care for—and company every Sunday!—ever be lonesome? In the morning she would walk to town, a matter of a mile, to select her meat and vegetables and (if it were hot enough, Minnie declared) carry them home. What the daughter did not realize was that Marianna was reverting more and more to the habits of her girlhood. Yet, along with this, she still wrote Owen and Karl about business ventures, caution here, a word of advice there; with Alan in the house she began to slur over the business which had interested her formerly, devoting herself, instead, to him, to the house, and to her own private accounts. For the first time in her life, that summer, her check-book stubs failed to agree with the bank-balance sheet. She explained this to Minnie by saying that she found the garden demanding

more attention, and that in the future Minnie had better do the figuring. . . .

Alan was taught, first, at home; he was shy, diffident, and grandmother and aunt decided to accustom him to American ways before sending him to school. Karl had been firm that the boy must go to public school, although Minnie protested (by letter) that one of the academies would be better, and that the boys were nicer there. He had been carefully tutored, and, in 1906, was ready for high school.

The boy was not lonesome. Avidly, he took to this country of which he had seen little: it wasn't right, grandmother and aunt thought, that the boy should actually be glad, with his mother and father in the Orient. It wasn't natural . . . although Alan was a pretty good boy, and willing to mind them, in almost everything.

The Meissings—Marianna and her daughter—knew nothing of a correspondence between John Middleton and Karl and Owen.

Things were not going so well on the ranch in the Sacramento: the Japanese (Middleton wrote) were slowly forcing him back, acre by acre and step by step, from his land. About him, now, was not a single white potato-grower; the association was controlled by Japanese, the prices were set by a Japanese, and the situation close to intolerable. "Why," Middleton wrote, "seven-eighths of the children in the school my daughter attends are Japanese. I am offered a good price to lease the land. What would you do?"

The brothers felt that it was unwise for them to give definite advice. In their answering letter they

said that he must judge for himself, and do the best he could, considering everything; they reminded him that, as far as money went, the interest on that which they had invested for him should keep him and his family comfortably. But their reply to Middleton's next letter was in a different tone. All that Middleton had written was that the son of the Japanese who leased the land next to his had brought the daughter, Roberta-Ann, a box of candy one night, and that he didn't like it; didn't the brothers think . . .

What had happened was this: the girl had been standing on a bridge over one of the arms of the Sacramento, watching nothing at all; the son of the Japanese neighbor was below, barrowing sand from the bank to his father's land, he looked up, and saw her above him; the sun caught her shining hair, and a loose middy-blouse revealed as much of her neck as to picture to him the snowy rest. The moment she was aware of him, and of his scrutiny as he stood in ecstasy, she turned and walked away, leaving him to thrill, suck a finger and giggle at ease, his heart leaping like a wood-fire. That night he came to the Meissings', very serious and very smiling outwardly, candy in hand, and—what Middleton did not write—came the next night, and the next, as well.

What the brothers thought was very clear, and not to be mistaken.

Japanese men (Karl wrote, with Owen commenting ceaselessly) were entirely different from white men. In the first place, a woman was nothing more than a thing from which to take enjoyment or to labor for them. This was not elaborated upon; they were sure

Middleton would understand. However, Middleton must bear this fact in mind: no matter how careful he was, the Jap was apt to stick to his knitting until something unpleasant resulted. He had better lease his land, get out of the district, and go somewhere else. If he wanted, he could take a little trip to the Orient: they'd be glad to have him and his family. Or, if that wasn't feasible, why not run down to San Rafael? It was a pretty town—of course he knew where it was—and near the city. With Minnie and mother there, it would not be the same as going to a strange place. Take it easy there, until he knew what he wanted to do. One of them—it was Owen's turn—would be out pretty soon, and then they could talk it over.

Middleton left his ranch-farm seldom; the Meissings hardly knew the wife, and were unprepared for the daughter; they met them at the station, and were insistent that they stay with them: Middleton, however, said that he had promised his daughter to take her and her mother to the hotel, until they found a house. . . . Alan, Minnie explained, was over in the city, but would be back that night, to start school in the morning. . . . How old was Roberta-Ann, now? . . . What grade was she in? . . . why, they'd be classmates! . . . What lovely brown hair you have, Roberta-Ann! . . . And there is so much to do in San Rafael—the tennis courts at the hotel are in fine shape, Alan says—do you play? . . . I know a delightful small house, Mrs. Middleton, down on Mission Street, with a kitchen in white enamel, facing north, and convenient for shopping. . . .

The first-year class was alphabetically grouped on the right side of the study-hall, a teacher assigned them their seats, checking automatically any desire of best-friend to sit by best-friend: from where Alan sat he could see the following—on the wall in front of him, a picture of a gentleman scantily clad playing some strange instrument (the boy thought it looked like a bellied *san-hien*) to a many-curved lady who reclined on a stone bench (the gift, this picture, of the departed senior class), a second picture of G. Washington playing Eliza-across-the-Delaware, companioned on the right by a somber, melancholy Lincoln, flag-draped; out of the windows to the right, the Episcopal Church; all about him, the other students. They frightened him (he was not going to show it), and he was extremely careful of doing anything that might indicate to them that he did not know what everything was about. After a first appraising glance, he looked stolidly down at the surface of the initialed, carved desk, fastening his eyes between the half-filled inkwell and cabalistic initials cut into the wood: S R H S '04. . . .

There was a flutter about him, as the master-clock rang a bell in each room; the school was standing up, but Alan, eyes on the desk's top, did not see them. *Alla breve*:

"We pledge allegiance to our flag——"

"Stand up!" voices hissed at him reedily.

He looked hastily about, saw that every one stood, and scrambled noisily to his feet, his face red, his ears burning. When, with a great whispering and scraping

the study-hall sat again, he was left a moment upright. What was all this, anyhow? he wondered, as he slumped into his seat. Then instructions: lists of books to be bought, hours for recitations, assignment to rooms, student-body dues, and lastly the cheering news that there would be nothing further that day, and actual work would begin the following morning.

Alan was out of the study hall, on his way to the entrance-door, when he was accosted:

"Why didn't you stand up on time, kid?"

He mumbled something, and kept on his way.

"This ain't Japan. You got to salute th' flag th' first day'v school. What you thinkin' about, anyhow? Th' mikado?"

Other voices, too: maybe he don't know . . . never went to school before here . . . time he was told something, then . . .

"Look here!" the first voice continued. "When a senior addresses you, you want to stop an' lissen."

Alan stopped and listened dutifully. A ring formed about him. Why couldn't they leave him alone? Very miserable, he was close to crying.

The senior began to harangue:

"I'm gonna tell you something, now, that you got to remember a long time. This is a country where there are nothin' but white men, and we all act like white men, an' we honor an' respect th' flag, and we are gonna expect that in the future——"

Alan felt that every eye in the school was watching him; quick hot tears of embarrassment welled up and blinded him, and he could think of nothing to say to release himself from this tormenting—without even

looking up, he struck out, and tapped the senior lightly on the chest.

A warning hiss.

"I'll wait for you outside!" the senior promised ominously. "I'll—wait—for—you——"

"What is this?" the teacher who had caused the hiss inquired.

Mob-like, they told her.

"Fighting? Right in the hall? Why, I've never heard—what is your name, young man?"

Miserably: "Alan Meissing."

"I will speak to Mr. Mahoney" (the principal) "about this, and see what he will have to say! And"—listening to the whispers—"you hit him first? without any provocation? Why, I never heard of such a thing! I must say that——"

"I . . . didn't mean—" Alan began.

The teacher drew herself up.

"To continue from where I was so rudely interrupted," she went on, "I must say fighting in school is a decided mark of poor breeding."

"'Every pig thinks his own sty is the best,'" Alan muttered in Japanese.

"What did you say?" sharply.

"Nothin'." He had a sudden sense, because of her non-understanding, of superiority, and even the pupils sensed that his remark had not been complimentary.

There was a little moment of silence, and then a girl's voice:

"He . . . was being teased, Miss Graham. . . ."

The teacher looked undecided. She knew that the older children were, on the first days of the term, al-

ways deviling the newcomers. "Well," she said graciously, "this time I'll not let the matter go any further, and I will say nothing of it to Mr. Mahoney. But—do not let it happen again, Alan!"

Alan looked at the girl who had come forward for him; he was horribly ashamed of having cried, although the "fighting" troubled him little. The rest of the youngsters had miraculously disappeared, swiftly, all at once, from the hall.

"Thank . . . you," Alan stammered.

"I only told what I saw. Don't be a goose. Stop crying."

"I'm not cryin'," fiercely. "I never cried. I was just mad. Next time I'll . . . I'll . . . go for that big——"

She looked at him mockingly.

"He's lots bigger'n you are. He plays on the football team, too. And he's almost a man. Are *you* Alan Meissing?"

He nodded.

"I thought you were taller. I'm Roberta-Ann."

Alan tried to remember how Aunt Minnie said he must act, and mumbled something about the pleasure of her acquaintance. Then—what came next? Aunt Minnie said—what was it? He knew, and put it into words: of course she didn't have any books yet, none of them had, but anyhow——

"Please, Roberta-Ann, may I walk home with you?"

"So that big boy won't lick you when you get outside? Why, Alan Meissing! Of *course* not! I wouldn't——"

"I'm not afraid of——"

She whirled away.

"Oh, *shut* up," she said crossly.

3

The fight took place on the grassy stretch between the grave of Mrs. Hawkins' first husband and the Episcopal Church itself; it started by Alan being escorted there by a dozen boys, his jacket removed, and then his being punched by the senior, Arthur Warren, as follows: first, upon the nose, second, upon the nose, and third, upon the nose, at which time the mistreated organ began to bleed. The fourth blow, intended for the same spot was (as Arthur afterward admitted) an error in judgment, for Alan expected it; he grabbed the striking arm, revolved swiftly, bent, and the other boy slithered gently to the grass.

He came to his feet quickly, rubbing his arm.

"If I had pressed harder, I would have broken it," Alan said politely.

Dignity was severely ruffled.

Warren rushed Alan, arms flailing; the smaller boy took one incipient punch in the middle, got his arms around the other, and, with a queer movement of hips and shoulders, deposited him on the ground much as before.

"What th' hell!" Arthur Warren said, when he had breath.

"Japanese wrestling."

"Ju-jits?"

A nod.

"You know how to do it? You learnt it in Japan?"

"Yes."

"I'll be darned. Can you show me——"

Alan's ears had been alert that morning.

"Sure Mike," he said.

4

Roberta-Ann Middleton was remarkable, if by nothing save contrast. Girls of sixteen or seventeen are all charming, and mostly pretty: she was beautiful, and when you came to know her face, lovely. They were tall or of medium height, she was tiny; they were fair or—if there existed a strain of Spanish or Italian—swarthy; she was brown as a nut. Her eyes were singular; not large, but strangely like a dove's, glossed brown. Her hair, brown also, was very shining, and, in the sun, gold-shot. In figure she was like a boy, lean at the hip, without suggestion of even bud above. She was mobile, quick as a bird in gesture, her feet seemed to carry her all too slowly over the ground.

It would have been more readily understandable if Alan had selected a paler shrine before which to burn his candles, some one entirely different from the Japanese girls in outward appearance—blue eyes and yellow hair: what he was actually attracted by was Ann's utter dissimilarity in mind to the stolid Japanese women—her vivacity, the vividness which emanated from her like radiating fire.

What she, in turn, thought of him he did not know: he was pleased if she said a dozen words to him, and walked thereafter in a perpetual day-dream, magnifying them out of proper proportion.

Ann was popular. Her mother and father were delighted by that, seeing a reward to the girl for the miserable friends she was forced to have in the Sacramento Valley. She was slender, wiry, and could (and did) play tennis from morning until it was too dark to see the balls. She played like a boy, and even learned to serve like one, using a high-thrown, half-cut, well-placed ball: she played with boys or girls indiscriminately. She was not a tournament player, although her game was swift; she was—boys said—one girl who wouldn't call "the close ones" the wrong way.

She was on the list of town girls who, properly and effectively chaperoned, attended the military-academy dances; Alan, furiously loyal to the public school, found vent in painting a huge red S R on the academy back-stop, the night of one of the dances, and, together with four boon companions, was chased clear to the edge of the marsh by the academy boys. It rather spoiled the dance, and he was elated over this trick, boasting of it.

"You should have been ashamed of yourself," Ann told him. "It was a nasty trick."

He wanted to say: "I wish the high school gave a dance oftener'n once a term, Ann. Will you dance with me when we have the next one?" What he actually said was, "Yaah! Those ole academy bloats make me awful sick! They all think they're somebody. Only way they fight is ten to one. You make me awful sick too, Ann Middleton, chasin' around with them. Whyn't you have some school spirit or somethin'? Whyn't you——"

"I wouldn't go with *you*, anyhow," she gave him.

"I cert'nly wouldn't. You ought to mind your own business, Mr. Alan Smarty Meissing, that's what you ought to do."

She could not be (and was not) unaware of the devotion he gave her, although it would have possibly been more successful if it had taken different forms. He teased her whenever possible, although what he wished to say was vastly different. Once, on the afternoon of a class picnic, he found a boy sitting beside her, in a rock-cranny away from the rest; he climbed the cliff and got above them, carrying a paper-boxed burden, and, after careful squintings of the eye dropped the box's contents—a chocolate-marshmallow cake—dexterously on the boy's head. (The boy didn't fight him—feller couldn't scrap a guy who knew ju-jits like Alan did—but he took the descending cake as evidence that Alan was displeased, and left Ann alone. She rewarded Alan by carefully ignoring him from that moment on.)

There were deviations. A blonde senior-girl, when he was in his third year, lasted the longest—two months. And then, as the girls would tease Ann, "the cat was back again."

His feeling toward Ann was curious. Her very aloofness was her principal charm; about her there was nothing suggestive of sex, she was still daintily small and undeveloped, both physically and mentally; yet she had that which made boys "like" her, without actually knowing why. She was not one of the girls who wanted to be kissed. If you tried, you were very apt to get slapped; if you did succeed, she attached no importance to it, and you couldn't, either.

She and Alan had one thing in common, one ground of discussion which both agreed upon—the future.

Ann wasn't going to college: it would be just like more school, and she was sick of school; when she graduated she was going to *do* something. Most of the girls, she said, who weren't going to college or to Normal would work until—a wrinkle of an adorable nose—until they got married. *She* wasn't going to get married, ever. *A Hausfrau! Ugh!*

Alan guessed he'd have to go to college, but, anyhow, he was going East, and that wouldn't be exactly the same as going to California or Stanford. Then he'd go out to the Orient with dad and Uncle Owen; he'd go all over, too, China, and the Philippines, and Borneo and everywhere! Of course he'd have to work in the office sometimes, but it wasn't like an office here, and there were all kinds of things, like tiffin, and three hours for lunch, and everything. Fellow in an office here must go crazy! Same old thing every day——

"Say, Ann," he said, once, when they were talking this over.

"Yes?"

"About what you said—you know—about gettin'—I mean, about not gettin' married——"

They were in their last year, and she had become more sedate, but now she turned on him furiously, and said, "You—shut—up, Alan Meissing!"

5

Minnie felt that Grandmother Meissing spoiled Alan, although she, in turn, did the same thing. His father sent Minnie an "allowance" for Alan, operated as fol-

lows: perfect behavior, ten dollars a month, forgetting to change his "school clothes," ten cents off daily, neglecting to practise the piano a full hour a day, the same, a poor report card, ten cents subtracted for each mark below a "2," and so on down an intricate list. Marianna always gave the boy sufficient to cover the shortage, with the whisper not to say anything to Aunt Minnie about it—Minnie did the same, and with a similar warning.

In the four years of high school the boy saw his father and mother twice, and his Uncle Owen twice; every visit was a continuous festival for him—theaters, dinners-in-the-city, baseball games (with Uncle Owen), and a variety of warnings about his future conduct. Aunt Minnie was able to report that Alan was just like his father and uncle: he didn't worry any about girls, except that he and Ann Middleton were good friends—other girls didn't bother him.

"What's the matter with him, then?" Owen asked his sister. "Don't he ever take a girl out or——"

"We wouldn't let him," Minnie said swiftly. "He comes straight home from school." Smiling: "He wants to be like you even more than like his father, Owen. He thinks you are very wonderful."

"Does he?" Owen said queerly.

He spoke of it to Alan, a few months before the boy was ready to graduate from high school.

"I hear you've a girl, Alan," he began.

"Yes, sir—I mean no, sir."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Why . . . it's kind of hard to say, Uncle Owen . . . I like Ann, if that's what you mean. But she

isn't so terrible . . . crazy about me." Then, all of a rush: "Ann and I—we both are kind of sick of San Rafael, I guess. I'll be glad when I can come out with dad and you. Ann says she's going to be a nurse. *I* don't think she ought to be, do you, Uncle Owen?"

"Perhaps—as you said yourself, Alan—she feels the same as you do. She wants to do something different. What do you think she ought to do?"

Alan looked down. Then he said suddenly:

"Whyn't you ever get married, Uncle Owen? Aunt Minnie says that you never found a girl you liked well enough, but grandma says once you found a girl, and she wouldn't have you, or something happened to her, or . . . or something." He paused, and as Owen did not answer, went on, "Didn't you ever—want—to get married?"

"You needn't tell your Aunt Minnie," Owen said, "but I did want to—a long time ago, Alan."

Alan nodded sagely.

"That's what I thought about it," he said. "I wanted to ask you something, Uncle Owen. You won't . . . think I'm a terrible fool? . . ."

"Ask away, Al."

"You know, I like Ann. It makes me . . . mad, I guess, to see another fellow with her. Some of the fellows are—oh, they kind of look at a girl as if—" he blundered into silence.

"I know, Alan. Go ahead."

"It's hard because I can't say anything to Aunt Minnie about things I feel. Once I said something, and she told me that *you* didn't ask such questions of your father——"

"I don't think I did, Alan. But that hasn't got anything to do with this."

"Well . . . you know how fellows are, Uncle Owen. . . . Do you know a part of San Francisco . . . Bartlett Alley? . . ."

"Ever been there, Alan?"

"No . . . that is . . . yes, sir. But I didn't—go in."

"I didn't either, Al."

"What I been tryin' to say is this, Uncle Owen," swiftly, "I don't feel . . . *that* way . . . about Ann. I don't feel that way about her *at all*. But when I went over to the city with the gang, I guess I wanted to go in, but I was afraid to. They—the boys—said that a fellow *always* feels that way, the first time." He looked at his uncle squarely. "I guess you think I'm a terrible fool, talkin' to you like this——"

"You're a good kid, Alan," Owen said gravely. "You've got to figure this thing out for yourself. I suppose that your aunt would want me to tell you that you shouldn't . . . hmm! . . . You do what you think is the thing to do, Alan."

The older man's eyes were troubled, and Alan said uneasily. "It's kind of hard growin' to be a man, isn't it, Uncle Owen? You think you have to do things, and you want to, but you think you oughtn't to . . . it's all kind of funny."

"Dam' funny," Owen agreed.

The only portion of this conversation that ever came to Minnie was entirely apart from its bearing: Alan had become, she told his grandmother sadly, simply

terrible in the language he used. It was "damn this" and "damn that" . . .

"*Ja!*" Marianna had said shortly. "If the boy never does anything worse than that——"

You couldn't argue with mama, Minnie believed; as she grew older she became worse and worse. The only person she listened to was Owen, and what did *he* know about bringing up a boy? Mother was becoming—Minnie did not know the exact word, but Owen called it "fussy"—about things that once never troubled her. When Minnie and the boys had been young, Marianna wanted young people around for them, but she saw no need of it for Alan; boys would trample the flowers, or, in the house, make a noise when she wished her afternoon nap; girls—what did Alan want with girls? This last Minnie agreed with; she hoped that Ruth and Karl would keep a strict watch over Alan when he went back to Yokohama, and not let Owen "try to make a man of him" while he was still a baby. . . .

When Alan left for college she still considered him as unfit to cope with the difficulties of life apart from home; his ticket was bought for him, expenses, living-quarters discussed in great detail, the importance of woolen underwear and French-flannel shirts in the eastern winter impressed. Aunt Minnie cried copiously when the train whistled and the porter grabbed up the little step. Marianna said to her, "It was different when Johann left home . . . *ja*, different . . . stop being foolish, Minnie. The boy is a good boy, and he has plenty of money——"

Minnie wailed: "That's it, mama. He has too much

money, perhaps. Think of all the things he can do with nobody to see at what hour of the night he gets in!"

Her mother smiled, saying. "I have not thought about such things for a good many years, Minnie!"

Alan stood in the vestibule, and, as he called "Good-by, grandma—good-by, Aunt Min" he wished that Ann had selected another day to have entered training at the Sherman Hospital. She had gone this particular day simply to plague him! He wondered, if Ann had been there, if she, as well as the other two women, would have kissed him good-by; his chest swelled, and he thought, "I'd have kissed *her*, anyhow. Yes, sir, I *would* have. I cert'nly would . . ." Reiterated, the notion lost force; he wouldn't, and knew it.

CHAPTER II

I

ANN'S wiry strength and her swift feet sent her through the hospital's period of probation with never a falter, where larger girls became exhausted physically or mentally, and, finding that nursing consisted of something more than a cool hand upon a fevered brow (masculine, and handsome), decided that nursing was not their bent, and that they had been badly mistaken: one probationer dropped out because she found that her hands were being ruined. In some way—neither of them knew just how—Ann's roommate was Arabella Wingate, a long thin girl who whistled her way over troubles gleefully; if none existed, she made them, and the night matron insisted that she was at the bottom of every devilment that existed from seven to seven. She was called, at first, Bella, to which she objected violently; "Win" came next, and would have remained, if the angular nurse had not expressed (for purposes of argument solely) an admiration for a certain socialistic orator whose given name was Stitt: "Stitt" she became from that time on, and even visiting doctors addressed her as "Miss Stitt."

Ann's day began at twenty minutes past six; out of bed, face washed, hair thrown into a hasty knot under her cap, into her uniform, and up to breakfast on the

fifth by six-thirty: Stitt shaved this down by three minutes by the simple matter of washing her face after breakfast.

Toward little Ann the doctors took a semi-protective attitude. They called her "Little Thing," and would actually tease her just to see her tiny firm chin go into the air, and watch her eyes sputter that which she dared not say. She had the terrible dignity of the late 'teens; she wanted to be "treated professionally" she wailed to Stitt. She learned avidly, energetically; she was going to be a *real* nurse; she was going to have a profession, and nothing was ever going to stand in the way of that.

It became a byword at the hospital that you could get little Middleton to do anything for you—bring you a cup of coffee into the surgery if you missed breakfast, hand out some of the linen from her floor if you were short—anything, so long as you didn't take advantage of your seniority in training and *tell* her to. If she liked you, she was fiercely loyal. If she didn't—often for no particular reason, or simply for toadying to the matron—she would, as Stitt said, "snip up her nose at you" and that ended it.

In a collection of girls it was inconceivable that impositions were not attempted; there were some of the nurses who made a practise of seeing "how much they could get away with." Toward these, and toward them, Ann developed something which had heretofore been largely latent. A temper. Not as vindictive as her grandfather's, whom she had never known, but nearly as implacable. She did not cherish injuries, but she remembered them. Quick, always, there cropped up in

her, to keep company with her innate restlessness, the ability to do what the nurses called "fly off the handle"—you couldn't pick on little Middleton. She wasn't a spitfire, but it was not good medicine to cross her. The head nurses discovered that she would work speedily and well—if you left her alone to do it.

She was no larger than she had been in high school, nor more developed, physically; she was in figure like a boy still, and had a boy's thorough squareness of mind. But she made a dainty jaunty appearance in her blue-and-white starched uniform and Dutch cap; the stiff linen gave her a roundness that was not her own, a semi-maturity that was the more alluring because she was so much the bud, and so little the flower. Her very attitude said: Dian!

None of this was lost on young male patients, and many not so young.

Training, and association, took from her less than it gave.

"What does he think I *am*?" she told her roommate once. "Don't I know what he's here for? Ugh! the dirty thing! Trying to be so smart and flirty! Ugh!"

She was more scrupulously careful in caring for "such cases" because she disliked them so. Secretly, she believed that the old men were the worst. They wanted to be young again. Ugh! True, their gift when they left the hospital was apt to be all out of accord to the service they were given, and sometimes Ann was able to trade patients because of this—if they became "too flirty."

Alan's letters to her were very grandiose. He was, of course, very much a man now, and took great pains

to convey that impression to Ann: he omitted no detail that would prove this point. When he was a bit blue, or lonesome—especially before examinations he was not too certain of passing—he would begin his letter “My darling little Ann”—and take, in return, a long lapse in her answering by way of rebuke. Her letters were filled with little hospital gossip, and he came to have a terrible dislike of every doctor she mentioned, and a positive hatred for each interne. Gosh! he thought, hearing what his confreres had to say about nurses. He wished incipiently that he had been four years older than Ann, and a doctor in the same hospital where she was training. Gosh, those darn M.D.’s were always after a nurse, and Ann was—so—darn—pretty!

She was sitting at the report-desk on her floor, charting, and wondering if she might slide a sheet of paper under the charts and write on it to Alan, when the newest interne came up to her. Nothing more than the fact that the girl she liked least of all the nurses was claiming the embryo surgeon as her own made her look up, provocatively, pertly.

“Hello, li’l thing,” he said.

“How do you do, Doctor Willard,” she said, smiling at him in contravention of her demure greeting.

“How’s ever’ li’l thing?” he asked, coming closer to the desk.

“Very quiet on the floor, Doctor.”

“Hmm. Where’s the other nurses?”

“At supper, Doctor.”

“Any doctor on the floor, making rounds?”

“No, Doctor. If there were, I would be with them.”

"Well, well. Now what do you think of that!"

Her downcast eyes told him nothing of what she thought.

He came beside her, and coughed gently.

"You're an awful cute li'l thing, Middleton," he said.

She bobbed her head.

"Thank you, Doctor."

"I'll bet you don't come up to my necktie," he gibed.

"I'll bet you don't."

"What," she asked softly, "what will you—bet?"

"A big box of Haas' best, or Maskey's, if you like it better. Now——"

"We have plenty of candy, Doctor. The patients have all——"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Willard told her. "If you come up to my necktie—the knot, that is—you win, and I'll buy you a dinner on your night-off."

"And if *you* win?"

"Why . . . then you've got to come and have dinner with me."

"I seem to get the dinner either way, don't I, Doctor?"

"Well . . . you see . . ."

"Why didn't you just ask me to go?"

"Oh, you've always been standoffish. And you've been just a kid. But you're growing, Middleton. You certainly are growing." He looked down at her, and his smile became tight-lipped. "Stand up, and let's measure," he said.

There came to Ann the sudden thought that, in the eyes of this man, older than she, she was attractive. It was not an unalluring notion. The hospital had kept

her too busy, the hours—seven to seven—were too long and arduous, for her to have had opportunity, as yet, to have tired of the life, and it was simple curiosity that brought her to her feet. The letter to Alan was forgotten. Alan—he was just a college kid. This was a man, and considered her as a woman. There wouldn't be any harm . . .

She stood up.

"Now let's see," Willard said breathlessly. "Let's see."

He measured from the top of her cap to the necktie in question very judicially. "It's very close. Very close indeed. Hard to say which is which. You'd better put your head against it so I can tell for sure."

She had barely touched him when his arms were about her.

There flowed into her, with that contact, all that she had fought against in mind; she seemed to become passive, receptive; her virility, of which she was so proud, gone, and in its place a curious, almost pleasant lassitude.

A hand lifted her chin.

"No," she whispered. "No . . ." and then, swiftly, the spell broken, "I think I hear . . . somebody coming——"

He released her instantly.

"Meet me—on the balcony—when you come off duty," he said huskily. "And then I'll . . . measure . . ."

The spell was broken utterly.

"Yes, Doctor," she said soberly. "At seven."

"At seven."

When he stepped out on the dim concealed balcony that overlooks the city, and called, "Ann—Ann!" to the figure that stood in a black corner, he was elated with the discovery that she had actually kept the appointment; he stepped quickly to the blur of gray, had his arms about it swiftly, when he heard a dozen different-pitched giggles. Ann's among them, but not coming from that which he embraced—an anatomy dummy in nurse's cap and uniform. Ann had, also, made certain that among the girls who watched Willard's discomfiture was the girl who said he was "wild about her" . . .

Ann's last year-in-training found her working furiously, yet with a strange new restlessness; it wasn't so much that she wanted something new and different, it wasn't that she disliked what she was doing (she was in the surgery now), the rush of emergency-cases, of swift operations, was all-consuming—what troubled her, although she refused valiantly to think of it, was all internal, all a part of herself. She wanted . . . she did not know what she wanted. Perhaps, she thought bitterly, she was like that new girl down on the third, who boasted that it took a lot of love to keep her satisfied. She wasn't like that. She tried to talk to Stitt, her roommate, about it, but Stitt, inconsequential, started to do her famous gogo dance, and in moments a half-dozen off-duty girls were in the room.

She had thought to assuage the new feeling by trying to go out more, in her hours off. There was the patient who had been in 516: he was a nice fellow, and his mother and sister were lovely to Ann; with him she had discovered new things to eat in new places—

chicken-livers en brochette at Dante's, glorious crab-salads way down on Pine Street, at New Frank's: she was not prudish, and attached no importance to the first time he snatched her into his arms and kissed her: it was not that same possessive embrace of Doctor Willard's, and, before it ever became so, she had stopped going out with him. The reason was simple: the man's sister had telephoned Ann, when she was on her week-end leave of absence, at San Rafael, and said that she and her mother wanted Ann to come up for dinner.

"Goin' to be inspected," Stitt told her, when Ann broke this important news. "Goin' to see if you eat with a scalpel and spear your salmon with a probe! Poor Annie! Another good nurse gone wrong!" Then, as the girl did not answer, "You got a letter here from your absent sweetie, Ann. I think I'd better write him, and tell him that the affair is gettin' serious."

Ann had no intention of going. Now she burst out with, "You mind your own business, Arabella Wingate——"

"Don't call names, Middie! Say 'Stitt' an' be friendly."

"Well——"

"'Member what we're goin' to do, Ann. Get cases together. Now you are gettin' foolish, and want to be married."

"I don't."

"Sure you haven't got th' itch for it, Ann?"

"No!" explosively.

"You listen to little Stitt, Ann. You look so darn' small and cute that the men get a notion that you

ought to be taken care of. Only pretty soon they want to take care of you another way. Men give me a decided pain, anyhow. They think they're so foxy, but any girl with an ounce of sense knows what they're after. Once in a coon's age you find one that's different. Me, I'm lookin' for that fellow, and if I ever find him, he's goin' to have a hard time pullin' away from Stitt! When I get hold of a real man, and not just a dog in the mating season, Stitt'll fall, but not one minute before."

"I think—you know who he is, Stitt, the nice boy that was in 516—I think he wants to marry me."

"Didn't I say it? All aside from your buildin' up a profession, I tell you men are all alike. How much does he know about you? Darn little. Some here in the hospital, a little more when you ate down-town with him—say, don't you know I'm wise to what you've been up to?—and a lot that he imagines. Most of that, Ann Middleton, is because you look good to him. Even if you don't let on you know it, you've got nice legs, and you're cuddly. *That's* what interests him, and he thinks it'll satisfy him enough so that he's willin' to have it around the rest of his life, and feed it and furnish it with a house to live in. You? He doesn't know anything about you, Ann. Not the real you. And he doesn't care! Legs! Pretty shiny hair! Brown eyes! Bah! they make me tired!" She stopped for breath, and then rumbled on, "This love at first sight stuff is nice to read about, and nice to think about—bein' swept off your feet, and all that, but the darn thing's all physical, all outside of your real self. How 'bout it?"

"I suppose so," Ann said in a small voice.

"You do more than suppose. You know. The deuce of it is that a girl—even a nurse, and God knows they work us to death here!—has usually more time to think about these things. A man keeps busy. He does his chasing in the evenings; sort of relaxation, he prob'ly considers it. And they aren't gettin' any better, either. Sometimes I think they—the men—have it too easy now. I'll bet when there were Indians around a fellow wouldn't be so fast to spoon under a tree in the park——"

"They didn't have parks then, Stitt."

"What I meant was that the early Americans had to scratch for a living, and now anybody who isn't a complete bum can make enough to get by on. I say——"

"Would you have wanted . . . a colonial family, Stitt? Maybe——"

"I'd rather have a colonial family *and* a husband, than one spoiled kid and my husband up on the second floor for something somebody handed him, Ann Middleton! You always go to extremes, anyhow. What'd I begin talkin' about?"

"Men."

Stitt grinned. "I didn't get sidetracked as bad as I usually do," she said. "Anyhow, as I said before, what d'you think about it all, Ann?"

"Oh . . . I don't know."

"Then you're the first girl——"

"I guess . . . I don't *want* to like . . . but——"

"A little hug and kiss, Ann, is just like a cocktail before dinner. It wakes you up. It's appetizing. It makes you think how wonderful it will be when the real

man comes along. It doesn't hurt anybody—except the poor fish who thinks that just because you close your eyes when he kisses you that all he has to do is to either say, 'Name the day' or 'What hotel do you like best?' Just as long as a girl doesn't let herself go, like that kid Perkins who isn't happy unless she's got a man around—as long as she keeps busy, everything's perfectly correct and satisfactory. The trouble is that the men don't want it that way."

"What you said before—that they—the men—haven't as much to do as they used to—that strikes me as a pretty good idea, Stitt. And so, instead of—oh, going to strange countries, or having to fight for their lives—they do their—adventuring——"

Stitt knew nothing of psychology, but she said disdainfully, "Wise thought, little Ann. They like a fight. And they like strange women. Maybe they always did. But now they've got more time for them. Say"—suddenly—"you goin' to dinner at the house you were tellin' me of?"

Ann looked at her queerly.

"No," she said slowly. "I guess I'm not. Although . . . maybe . . ."

"Once you eat at the family table, Ann, the first thing you know you will be down at O'Connor's pricin' sheeting, and the next thing you'll be between it—and find out you've got some one next to you that you never saw before. Stitt knows. That is"—hastily—"entirely by intuition, which is Stitt's womanly gift. Me, I'm a good girl. Now suppose you and I go out and see what the nickelodeon has to offer, and then come home like nice roommates."

"You start to get ready, Stitt. I'll go. I'll write a note first. It always takes you longer to get ready than it does me.

"Remember——"

"Remember what?"

"Nothin'. Nothin' at all, Ann."

Stitt had been about to ask Ann to convey her regards to Alan.

2

She did not see Alan until three years after she had become a graduate nurse.

Alan's uncle, Owen, and his father, had opened a New York buying office, which they directed alternately, and were together in only on rare occasions, and Alan spent his vacations there, and after college, was informed that it would be wise if he began to "learn the business" in New York. It did not fit in with his plans; he was keen to get to the Orient. Why, he discovered, his job was work. He didn't mind that, but he did mind the subway in the morning, lunch, the subway home . . . every day, every day. This discontent was unmarked by his father and mother, seen but never commented upon by Owen; Marianna, visiting New York, discovered it before she had been there two months. The size of the city did not frighten her, but the prices did: Owen said that mother was cheerful from the tenth of the month until the twenty-fifth, and then she began worrying about the size of the rent-check that would be paid on the coming first: when, the middle of the month, she showed

signs of moroseness, certain symbol of worry, Owen, who alone dared question her, asked the trouble.

"What's the matter with you, *Mutter?*" he asked. "You look as if that roast we had disagreed with you. You ought to take a long walk after dinner. I think"—grinning broadly—"that you're getting kind of fat."

"Fat—like a match," Marianna retorted. "I take a little walk down Broadway every morning. I'm not so young as I once was" (Owen talked that over with Karl, but decided adversely about purchasing mother a machine) "and a little walk is all I want."

"When you talk about being old you make me sick," Owen told her. "If you're old, I'm ancient. You've got more pep right this minute than I ever had." He smiled broadly. "What your trouble is—you're anxious to get back to San Rafael and see if the gophers've eaten the roots of those carnations you were telling me about."

Marianna made certain that Ruth was not in hearing, and then nodded her head: "*Ja!* I will be glad to go home, Owen. It stifles me, here. There is not enough air. But that does not bother me."

"*Now* what you stewing about?" Owen demanded. "You're the worst fusser I ever saw. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. What's the matter?"

"Alan."

"What's the matter with him? Didn't he eat three helpings at dinner? He ate enough for a truck-horse. Ruth always says the girls in the kitchen never have enough left after that young Indian eats what he calls a modest meal. Buying him lunch when he's hun-

gry'd take the bonded debt of Japan! You worrying about the cost of feeding such a young pig?"

"A boy must eat. When you were his age, company thought you didn't ever get enough when we were alone."

"There you go, jumping on me. Seriously, what's the trouble with Alan?"

"Nothing!"

Owen looked at her sharply, and the old woman, shaking her head as if something annoyed her, continued, "Nothing—that is the trouble. He is sick of what he does. He thinks it all amounts to nothing. He is sick of his work——"

"Work? The kid's got a cinch, compared with what Karl and I——"

"The boy is not content. *Ja!* I know."

"I'll keep an eye on him. He's got a long way to go before he's perfect—something like a million miles—but if I keep after him, perhaps some day he'll earn what we pay him."

Marianna nodded. She was thinking that Owen, also, was changing, even as she changed: five years ago he would have said to forget it; now he was more set, at once more dignified and argumentative.

"You watch out for him, Owen. Boys start the wrong way, how, *Gott allein weis*. It takes long years to get them back——"

"If he ever starts anything like that, I'll——"

"Watch him, Owen. He is tired of what he does. *Es kommt zu mir* that once upon a time there was another like that. And *that* boy was not perfect,

either. But now"—she smiled at him, half-timidly, "now—he is not so bad."

"You stop kidding me. I think you're trying to talk me out of a new hat. It does seem to me that Ruth——"

Fearful of a day's shopping, and more than content with her shabby comfortable bonnet, Marianna rose to leave the room.

"Some day I'll buy you a bright green one, with a red feather on it," Owen called after her.

She turned swiftly. "If you do, you can wear it for me," his mother promised.

This discontent showed in Alan's letters to Ann. He wanted something different. He was sick of New York. Ann, in her replies, yearned once to see the plays, the restaurants, and his fervent answer to that—for the first time—made Ann wonder if it actually were impossible: "He's only a kid," she thought.

Ann, the nurse, was beginning to discover that there was very little difference between Old Man Harrison, who had the flu, and the wife of Albert Williams, the banker: only this—Harrison tried to put his hands on her, and Mrs. Williams watched her husband, when Ann was in the house, like a chicken-hawk a crow-fledgling. Those nurses! And one case was like another. Just like another. Appendectomy, confinement . . . over and over and over . . .

She was nursing in San Rafael. Still strongly loyal, she gave to the doctor she worked for every bit of energy she had in her. She was a good nurse, he said. Her restlessness he loudly bellowed down: there was the time she wanted to go to Honolulu, where a Sher-

man graduate wrote there was a hospital vacancy—yet, she realized, Doctor Carter was right when he said that it would be “just the same”—same work, same cases . . .

Nursing hadn't seemed like that when she had decided to take it up. Nurses had been (she had thought) crisp, active women; alert, interesting, seeing much of life. She wouldn't trade—not for a minute—her own work for school-teaching, or stenography, and yet it left her pallidly dissatisfied.

Doctor Carter stood between her and some masculine patients, between her and younger doctors he would call in to give anesthetics for him: he considered her, and she him, as a necessary adjunct to the practise of surgery.

Her days off she tried to take out in feverish activity; tennis, sometimes, dinner in the city, a few glorious days in the *Dixie* on the Bay, when, her hair ablow, her eyes bright, she was oblivious to appreciative and watchful eyes; possibly, also, a kiss one night. Strangely discontent, vastly dissatisfied, restless. She was stubborn enough, plucky enough, to give in to this not at all; her mother suggested that Ann, Stitt and some other nurse go away for a trip, and that she forget work. She wouldn't; that was running away.

She was on a case when she received, forwarded from home by the maid-of-all-work, a letter from Alan. It was incoherent, hurriedly written. Dad and his Uncle Owen, he said, had decided that an offer made for the Japan business was too large, too tempting, to give over; Ruth, his mother, wanted to live in the States permanently again—in short, the business had

been sold. He didn't know what he was going to do . . . he didn't care what he was going to do . . . he could make his own way, anyhow, but he was sick of just doing that. Just working, and going back to the house, and then working again. He was coming home!

3

He telephoned her the first afternoon he was back in San Rafael; his old room was waiting for him, and he found nothing changed except his grandmother: she seemed smaller than he had imagined her to be, and at once sharper and more gentle. "Such a big boy," she said. "Such a big boy. You look like my Owen. And"—slyly—"you smoke as many cigarettes, too."

"It's me, Alan, Ann," he said breathlessly into the telephone. "I'm coming right down to see you."

"You're not! I'm dead tired, Alan. On a diphtheria case, just out of quarantine. You can come——"

"To-night!"

She seemed to consider, and then he heard: "I'll hardly know you, Alan. You had better wear a white carnation in your buttonhole——"

"Is *that* the way you meet men, Ann Middleton?"

"Why . . . I used to tell you to mind your——"

"I am! And, Ann——"

"To-night. Good-by, Alan——"

He shouted, "Oh, Ann, Ann," then, grinning, hung up the receiver and went out into the garden, to take the tiny bits of green his grandmother was transplanting, and, under her direction, make a great show of

taken with the idea. She had given him nothing to make him think that she cared for him. Yet paramount in his head was the fact that, lovely as she was, desirable as she must have been found, she was still unmarried; it *must* mean . . . there came, hard on this, the added bitter reflection that possibly she hadn't found any one, and that he himself was in that category.

Well, he'd find out . . .

He felt, excited as he was at the prospect before him, that her impregnability was a part of her charm.

Outside of her gate, he stopped, and very seriously lighted a cigar. He preferred cigarettes, but, so he had reasoned, girls thought a cigar more masculine, and he wanted her to think him every inch a man. He wanted her to think . . .

She had been on the steps, and as he held the match to his cigar, lighting his face, she called gaily: "Alan!"

The cigar had been an excellent plan.

It gave the nervous girl an immediate topic of conversation: she'd never seen him smoke before—how long was it, seven years?—he was so much taller——

"You're the same, Ann. Just the same."

"I won't grow any bigger, Alan. I'll always be a little shrimp."

"Yes. Always little."

"Alan, do you remember Sadie Lee? She's married, now, and I was on the case a few months ago—the darlindest baby you ever saw—and did you know that my old academy flame deserted me, and is in South America? Married, too! I'm about the only old maid."

"Ann——"

"And Donald Fox—he was so sweet on that girl from Mill Valley—I forget her name—he's got a job over at the Exposition in a coffee booth! In the class prophecy it said that he would be a success at anything he did! 'Sweep everything before him' was the way it was printed. He does! After the crowd goes home. And——"

"Ann! I want to——"

Her swift flow of words coated a nervousness as real as his own. She knew this Alan beside her, sitting on the steps, and yet he was different, and not the same; it was curious: he seemed boy and man. The boy she had known and fought with, and a man she knew not at all. He was quieter than as a boy—a silence not of his own making—and it seemed good to talk to him. His eyes were friendly. He . . . it came to her that he wasn't just a man, but some one she knew and trusted. A kind of super-friend, a person a part of her old life, yet no longer actually of it; a rather delicious dual personality.

She chattered gaily, inconsequentially, and soon he was forced to answer questions, where he was burning to ask one instead.

"Your grandmother— isn't she wonderful for her years?" Ann flowed along. "When I'm an old lady, I'll be satisfied if I'm half as active as she is. Nurses grow old fast, Alan." She smiled, adding, "It's almost nine. I know it's early to send you home, but I'm a real working girl, and I've got to go on a hard case in the morning——"

She stood up, Alan beside her.

"Good night, Alan. It's been lovely to have you here to-night—to have you back."

"Has it, Ann?"

"Of course. Good night. Phone me some time."

She held out her hand and he took it.

"I . . . I'm glad to be back, too," he said, for lack of anything better. Suddenly: "Remember how we used to—fight? And argue. And how you always bossed me about?"

What she had said, she decided, had been needlessly curt.

"I still can," she told him, laughing. "Come and take me to the picture-show to-morrow night"—commanding—"that is, if you want to, and aren't going to be busy."

He had not released her hand.

"To-morrow night," he repeated dutifully. "Yes, Ann." Huskily, almost painfully. "I'll always have the time. Always. I . . . oh, dear little Ann——"

Clumsily, where more expert and practised arms had failed, he tried to pull her to him.

Instinctively, she braced herself, then, strangely moved by his very awkwardness, his inaptness, came close to him voluntarily, and whispered, "Good night, Alan. It's sweet to have you in San Rafael again. You come down and take me to the show to-morrow night. Now—good night."

Seeing the expression in his eyes, she added swiftly, "Don't kiss me, Alan! Don't spoil everything!" Then, the dimming of the light she had seen hurt her; she believed her words, and offered him her lips.

The first kiss was a mere touch; in his haste, his

eagerness, he had simply brushed the end of her tilted nose: he tried to look in her eyes, but found them closed. She did not move, and, in the arms which tightened about her, scarcely breathed. He bent, and lips met.

She pushed him away at last.

"Good night . . . good night," she whispered.

He could not go with that.

"You'll marry me, dear Ann?"

The kiss had left her not herself; no mere contact had ever been like this before, and she seemed to have lost something that she found sweet in giving up, and gained that which made double recompense. What was, to her, strangest of all, was that she now considered what this meant to Alan, and not its relation to herself. . . .

"Wait," she breathed. "I—you—we can't know. Let me think about it. It's too soon. We *can't* know, or be certain. No—don't come to-morrow night. I'll tell you when I know. Please. No. Don't kiss me again—oh, good night . . ." and she was into the house.

Walking home, in the light of an already high white moon, he was conscious of a warmth that lingered where her breast had been against him; he was too elately dazed to think.

In the morning, all possible doubts came back to him. He fidgeted at the breakfast table, smoked between the sliced-oranges and eggs so that his Aunt Minnie said it spoiled her breakfast and that he was worse than Owen, picked up the newspaper, found himself staring at the

Births-Marriages-Deaths (which he never read), jumped to his feet when the telephone rang.

His grandmother and aunt heard him say, decrescendo——

"Yes . . . yes . . . of course . . . yes . . . sure . . . of *course* I understand . . . *sure* I knew . . . half-past seven . . . all right . . . yes . . . good-by."

He whistled the forty-odd feet back to the breakfast table, asked for another cup of coffee, and devoured the neglected eggs as if he had been unaware, before, that they were on his plate. Then, seeing that the two women were watching him furtively, he tried to pass it off for a moment, kept his eyes on the tablecloth. He picked up the paper, but involuntarily his fingers made of a section a cocked-hat; he set it on his head, and said largely, "I feel great this morning! I feel like the king of San Rafael!"

"You were grouchy enough until the phone rang," Aunt Minnie declared. "You acted like you'd lost your last friend. Who was it, anyhow?"

"At the telephone? Oh"—vaguely—"a fellow I used to know."

His grandmother looked at him curiously.

"*Ja!*" she said. The monosyllable registered huge disbelief, but it was, to Alan, like a kindly pat on the arm, the first expression of congratulation.

CHAPTER III

I

ALAN and Ann were married in the following spring; she insisted that she was not prepared, and—in the sweetness of discovering this new Ann, this lovely woman—he was content to wait. Their honeymoon they spent near Monterey.

They arrived in the small hotel they had selected in the middle of May, when the rains were over, and the heats of summer at hand. The low-lying dunes of sand were desert-dry, and dust lay white in the streets that were not paved. It was hot, nevertheless there was a delicate freshness in the winds that blew to the little city from the purple Pacific or from the Sierras, stirring the dust into spiral dances among the old pale adobe houses, shaking the tiny leaves of the tressy pepper trees in the mission garden, whispering the secret of the ages into the ears of the Virgin who, unwearied and happily submissive, bears up the peak of the roof; stealing across the endless dunes and rustling the spikes of lupine. The dawns and twilights had not lost the pure savor of their winter vitality, and the deepness of slumber still came with the nights.

Sage-green pines and cypresses near the ocean threw

patches of shade on the warm sand because they wanted to rest there; kingfishers rose in low, arrowlike flight to give diversion to long afternoons.

Alan felt marvelously changed. And Ann often seemed to him changed, too, because she was his own. That wonderful fact gave her new values, spread about her new mysteries that he did not attempt to fathom. In the beginning of their honeymoon there was a beautiful restraint which was an augury for the future; not all the doors were set violently open, not all the rooms ruthlessly visited. Alan found that the reverence, the idea of chastity, he had for Ann was greater now that he had received the gift than before. She was capable of refusal, but not of niggardliness or half measures. There was something primitive in her which spoke truth with a voice that was fearless; and yet that primitiveness was closely allied to her purity.

They were not bored, in the new discovery they daily made of each other; it was delightful, finding new opinions, new ideas, in an old, well-known container . . . delightful. Ann's friends had said that she would tire of such a "fool honeymoon—you won't ever want to *see* him again——" and she spoke of this to Alan.

"Were they criticizing me?" he asked.

"I wouldn't hear you criticized. I shan't, either."

"How do you know that?"

"I do know it," she said honestly; "nobody will criticize you when I am there."

He caught hold of her hand.

"And you? Don't you often do it silently? I'm sure you do. Why did you marry me, Ann?"

They were sitting in a sheltered hillock when he asked that question. A shining day—the near sea glinted—there was a golden pathway toward the Orient. The cypress forest lay wrapped in a mystery of sunlight, different from, yet scarcely less magical than, the mysteries of shadows and the moon. Ann looked out at this glory. She wore no hat, and her brown hair was given to the sun. She looked virginal, almost, because of her tiny figure, childlike, and Alan wondered, with the concealed humility of the lover, how she had ever given herself to him. He had always, from the time he had left home to go east, always wanted to marry her. There arose in him the cry, “What am I?” and the answer, “Only a man like thousands of other men, in no way remarkable, in no way deserving of this gift.”

Ann turned from the shining view. There was in her eyes an unusual vagueness.

“Why did you?”

“Why did I marry you, Alan?”

“Yes. When I first came home, you acted the same as if I were still going to school. A boy.”

“I always liked you. But I never thought of you that way.” More slowly, “It seemed like being *home* with you, when you came back. I felt rested.”

He remembered how she had drawn back from him.

“Sometimes I’ve thought, when I proposed—I did, didn’t I?—that there was a moment when——”

He looked at her, and then, for once, his eyes fell before hers almost guiltily. They sat in silence for a moment.

“And if there was, why did you think it came?”

said Ann suddenly, with an almost startling swiftness of decision.

Alan reddened.

"Don't you want to tell me?" she persisted.

"Oh, well . . . things go through our minds without wishing them to. You know that, Ann. Intruders, almost, and you must kick them out."

Half-laughingly, half-challengingly, she asked, "What kind of intruder did you kick out?"

"You . . . seemed to be . . . afraid of men. That was how it seemed. As if—you might have been—as if some one had *tried* to injure you."

"No one has, Alan. No one has even tried—hard enough to make it unpleasant, horrible. There were times—when I was awfully . . . discontented, Alan. Lonesome. Out of sorts. Wanting . . . anything, except what I was doing."

"I know," he said.

"You asked me why I married you. I didn't really answer you, Alan, and I'm not going to answer you now, entirely—for I don't exactly know: no girl does. But . . . you seemed to be different. Not like other men, most men."

"In what way?"

"A way that means very much to me," she answered, with purity and directness. "Women—nurses more than other women, perhaps—feel such things soon after they know a man. I couldn't . . . have married a man who lives as most men have lived." She paused abruptly, and after a short silence continued: "I care tremendously for that in you, Alan. More than you will ever know."

He flushed hotly, and looked away, and then said, almost warily, uneasily, "You were the very first, dear."

"Was I?"

"Yes, but—it wasn't religious feeling, or anything of that kind, that kept me from it. I . . . I guess I'm like all other men, Ann. I'm not like what you want me to be. There were plenty of times . . . when I wanted to. I don't know why I didn't. When I was blue—just like you said you've been—I felt that after . . . that . . . I didn't have anything—much—to look forward to. I . . . never thought of it in connection with you. It wasn't until you were really in my arms that—anyhow, now you know. You were the first. You will be the only one in my life."

There was a long silence between them. Then Ann said, with a change of manner to practical briskness:

"I wonder if we'll have a hard time finding a house?"

2

The relative merits of commuting as against an apartment in the city were settled for them. Ann's nurse friends were jovial about it. "Nine months and fifteen minutes," they called it.

Alan looked for what he had expected to be the immediate result: a starry-eyed radiance, or something like that; instead he found a tiring Ann, apt, for the first time, to be cross at trifles, annoyed by nothing at all. She was, despite the knowledge that might make her fearful because of her smallness, very unafraid, and (which distressed Aunt Minnie and her

own mother) frank about it all. She wasn't ashamed—why should she be?

They had rented a house on a hill, where they could see over the town, the far Bolinas hills, even the insweeping fogs from the ocean. Ann was in a flutter over it; everything must be "just right"; for the first time she took delight in cooking, and, because of what she believed Alan liked the best, learned from Grandmother Meissing to cook old-country dishes. Ann's mother said that her daughter proved that there was nothing in proverbs—your son's a son till he gets him a wife, but a daughter's a daughter all her life—although the girl acted no differently than she always had. Visiting her mother and father, it seemed that she slipped back into a life which was no longer hers, and in which Alan had no part; the Meissings, however, Aunt Minnie, grandma, Uncle Owen (Karl and Ruth had gone on to New York again)—were all a part of Alan: like she was, Ann thought.

On "the morning," before Alan had left on the seven-thirty, Ann said to him:

"I think you'd better stay home to-day. Phone the office, won't you?" He asked no question, and when he was done with that, she said, "Now, phone over to the city to Stitt, and tell her to come over. And then—yes, you'd better phone Doctor Carter, too, and not wait for Stitt to get here, so he knows, and she can get him when she's ready . . ."

"Ann . . . little Ann . . ."

She laughed, although nervously.

"Go ahead and phone, dear. When you're done with that, you'd better phone the folks, too——"

"You're wonderful, Ann!"

"No," she said. "Not wonderful, Alan. When you get done, come and hold my hand . . . I'm *not* frightened, I just want you near. . . ."

Alan thought that no train ever took so long to get to San Rafael as that which brought Ann's old roommate, Stitt Wingate; once the nurse was in the house he relaxed, something that neither his aunt nor Ann's mother brought him—they were, he decided, worse than he was: Stitt took hold immediately, for the two girls had talked the matter over before. What was more, she had a word for the uneasy mother and husband: *say*, wasn't Ann a strong healthy girl? there wasn't anything to it!

Grandmother Meissing refused to come over to Alan's: *ja!* there were enough around without her. The very thought of a great grandchild brought tears to her eyes. She had, in the last year, become smaller in stature, more readily exhausted, but in mind she was as keen and as active as ever; she had sent Minnie to Ann with the warning: "Don't make a fool of yourself, Minnie. This is not the first baby there ever was. And stop crying! *sverrückt*, such behavior!"

Alan planted himself, after the nurse came, at the front door. Where was the doctor? Why didn't Carter come? Why didn't he get a move on? Had the office-nurse given him the message? Every little wince of pain, every gasp, from Ann's room, set his teeth to chattering.

Why didn't Carter hurry up and go where Ann was—when the surgeon was in the house at last—what was he standing around and talking for?

At Ann's first "Oh!" short, sharp, he went outside. . . . How long he watched the border of marigolds he did not know. The nurse came to him.

"Come in!" she ordered swiftly.

"Is it——"

"No. Not yet. Ann wants you."

An Ann he did not know, flushed, with painfully bright eyes. . . . "Take my hand, Alan . . . it hurts . . . oh . . . oh . . . God! . . . it hurts." . . . Then silence, deep placid breathing . . . the agony over—and over and over . . . sudden movements in the room . . . Carter's voice: "Get out, Alan. Ready, Wingate?" . . . The horrible sweet odor of chloroform. . . . Silence, then, anew, intensified, "Oh! Oh! Oh!" Scurrying feet. Carter's hoarse whispering. A new thin raucous voice that Alan had never heard before. Stitt at his elbow. "Hello, papa! A boy."

"Is Ann . . . can I go in?"

"Sure thing, papa. Come along and see for yourself."

A sleepy-eyed Ann looked up at him.

"Was—I—terrible?"

Dumb, he shook his head.

"I didn't mean—to make so much noise. It wasn't so—awfully bad."

Alan looked at her, trying to say something.

Carter boomed, "Want to see your son, Alan?"

"No!" Alan exploded. "No!"

They shoved him from the room again, although Ann's mother and Aunt Minnie were permitted to remain, and he could hear them discussing the baby's many remarkable points. Alan looked at the hand

Ann had held. She had said that it hadn't been "so awfully bad," yet, on the palm of his hand, he could see the semicircles her finger-nails had made showing like white half-moons.

3

The baby—they called him Richard for no reason save they liked the name—was given a very definite part in the household, but by no means an all-absorbing one. Alan thought it was a very ordinary baby. As his head was practically bald, his forehead, which was wrinkled as if by experience, looked abnormally high. His face, full of puckers, was rather red; his nose meant very little as yet; his mouth, with perpetually moving lips, was the home of bubbles. His eyes were blue—although later they became as brown as Ann's—and looked large in his small countenance, which was usually decorated with an expression of mild inquiry. This expression sometimes changed abruptly to wrath, in which every feature became involved. Then the minute feet made feeble dabs at the atmosphere; the tiny fists doubled themselves and wandered back and forth as if in search of the enemy; and a shrill, very personal and very intense voice expressed the tempest of the soul.

Ann tried to condemn these rages, but, secretly, enjoyed the baby's roars; he was—what she admired—spunky; "What a fine man he'll be some day," she thought.

Yet, often, when she looked at the infant as he bubbled and cooed, sneezed with an air of angry aston-

frost, and forgot to before supper. When he came in his ears were red. 'They ought to be licked,' he said. What are children coming to, anyhow?"

"I thought you weren't going to gossip, Marie!"

"That isn't gossip, Ann. It's news."

"Both the same."

They didn't speak of it again.

Ann asked Alan, that night: "What do you think Mr. Mallon meant?"

Alan shrugged his shoulders.

"Lord knows," he said. "Kissing, probably." Then, "Kids are pretty precocious these days. Want to play some cribbage?"

"Not cribbage, Alan! We did that last night."

"Let's get the woman in, and go to the second show."

"Marie saw it last night. She says it's terrible."

"Well, what d'you want to do?"

"Oh . . . nothing!"

Alan picked up a magazine and laid it down.

"Say, Ann," he said. "Looks like we're getting settled."

"Does it? If you had baby screaming all of the afternoon, and when I said something to Aunt Minnie—she was up—all the satisfaction I got was to be told that when you had children you had to expect it! Settled!"

"Aunt Min should know—she never had any." Ingratiatingly, "Suppose we take in a show Saturday night, and have a feed at Tait's?"

"Tait's—crab cocktail, chicken patties, hearts-of-lettuce, black coffee! No."

"Well, how about the Tavern, then?"

"Oh, Alan, I can hear you say, 'The steak's pretty good here!' "

Doubtfully: "We can try a dago joint——"

"Luke-warm tagliarini and chicken that tastes like boiled feathers! I don't want to——"

"Say, what's the matter to-night, honey?"

"I don't know . . . what's got into me, Alan. Too much Aunt Minnie, and too much Marie Mallon, and too much of Dickie's crying . . . when baby gets bigger, maybe I'm going back to nursing for a little, and get cured of being so silly!"

"You aren't going back to nursing!" he flared.

She looked at him very demurely, saying, "Thank you, my lord and master."

"I'm not your lord and master. I only——"

"Yes," she mocked. "You only—you *only* want me to do as you say." Swiftly, "I don't know what's the matter with me, dear. I didn't mean——"

"Guess you're tired to-night, sweetheart."

"Guess I am," she agreed, smiling; she wasn't, physically, and knew it; knew, also, that he was aware of that.

5

Ann was at Grandmother Meissing's when Alan came; he knew that she would be there. She was at the door to meet him, and, after a look at his glum face, had no need to ask a single question. Aunt Minnie had been sniffing ever since Alan had gone over to the city, and sniffed still; Grandmother Meissing was ashen, and, when Alan came, his arm about Ann, into

the living-room, she took off her glasses that she might not see his face, and that the definite news might be thereby prolonged. He stopped in the doorway and lighted a cigarette.

"*Was hast du gesagt?*" the old woman asked, her voice even and firm.

"They wouldn't take me," Alan said. "God alone knows why—he and the damn fool that did the examining. Now"—bitterly—"I can stay home and help you knit, grandma. All around me were fellows yelping about exemption, and Class 4A¹ and dependents . . . and me—crazy to go, and——"

"Alan!"

Aunt Minnie fairly screamed it.

"I can't understand you," she whimpered. "You talk about leaving your wife and child——"

"Ann understands," Alan interrupted.

Ann nodded: she understood what moved her husband; she wished vaguely that, had it been possible for Alan to go, she might have gone overseas with some hospital unit . . . that was over, that notion.

"Your own grandfather left home to get out of the army——"

"That's it, Aunt Minnie. After we get through with Germany, she won't force fellows into the army——"

"And destroy a country that's given the world the best in art and music, just because——"

"It isn't the *people*, Aunt Minnie. There's German blood in me, but it's changed, because I haven't been bossed around by a lot of Hun overseers. Grandpa couldn't stand it, either. Why, I tell you, Aunt Minnie——"

"I am sorry you stay, Alan," Marianna Meissing said slowly. "Had you gone, I should not have been afraid for *you*: I should only have been afraid . . . suppose you should have . . . shot . . . my sister's boys. Or one of them you! For my sake, Alan, *ich bin froh*. For yours, I know how you feel." To Ann: "Young, hot blood, *liebe* Ann. He is a good Meissing. He is," twinkling, "not so bloodthirsty as his Uncle Owen, who is in favor of hanging all Germans he could not burn . . . but, Owen has seen something in his life, and Alan . . . *ja!* life is softer now as it used to be. . . ."

Minnie: "You mean 'than it was,' mother."

"*Ruhig!*" Then, "Owen comes for dinner to-night, Ann. He is bloodthirsty, but he will eat sauerkraut just the same! You and Alan—you come, too. . . ."

6

Owen held forth. When he was through—for a time—he said to Alan: "Tough, Al, on you. Want to get into the commissary? I know some of the big mucks: one of them was military attaché at Tokyo, and we used to——"

Alan finished it for him—"Get drunk together, I suppose?"

"Well, not exactly." He ate steadily. "That's some fine kraut, *Mutter*. Where'd you buy it? Herzog's?"

"Buy it? Home-made, Owen."

Owen winked at Ann.

"Kind of salty," he said.

"Mama always salts things too much or too little,"

Minnie interjected. "Or leaves a roast on the stove until it's overdone."

"Mama's the best cook in the world," Owen snapped.

"You bet!" Alan offered. "When it comes to cooking, she's got Ann skinned off the map. Hasn't she, Ann?"

"I can't cook like grandma can."

Marianna tried not to look pleased.

"I can not cook the new dishes," she admitted. "But the old ones . . . well, they are so-so." She looked at Owen half-timidly. "Are you going to stay at the hotel, Owen?" She wanted him to say that he was sick of it, and would take his room in San Rafael.

"I'm getting too cranky," he said. "Crabbed old bachelor, and getting worse every day. I'm just cranky enough to ask you, *Mutter*, what you drew that check for a hundred and fifty dollars for? The bank called me, and said you were overdrawn. Haven't I told you to let me know if you draw a check over a hundred? I keep your balance as low as I can, so you don't have it standing idle. You need a good bawling out! I won't give it to you, but you need it!"

Only Ann realized what the man was trying to say: that he was worried because in this he found that which he feared—that his mother was growing older, as proved by her memory. True, she had claimed that she did not hear as well as she once did, but, to quote Minnie: say something that she doesn't want to hear, and she always gets it!

"Well, Owen . . . I forgot . . ."

"Mama forgets a good deal," Minnie said. "And, Owen, she won't listen to me. She was out in the

garden before six this morning, and the dew was thick. She shouldn't."

"I get pleasure from it," Marianna said. "And I always rest in the afternoon."

Owen had been about to "bawl her out" about that, too; if she derived pleasure from her puttering, he'd be (he thought) a swine to talk her out of it.

"How's Dickie?" he said to Ann. "Bad as ever?" She dimpled.

"Worse. He was a fiend to-day."

"That means he's a Meissing. Alan's missed it. Maybe his son'll get in his good licks. Say, Ann, did I ever tell you about the fight I had, one night, in a little Jap village?" He told it, carefully veiling what the fight had been about, but being honest as to the result. "Guess I was about your age, Al, when it happened."

"I do my fighting with the custom-house clerks," Alan said, in a small voice. "And I get my adventuring wheeling the go-cart down Fourth Street."

"And Ann gets hers cleaning house," Minnie said. "You ought to be ashamed, Alan, to speak of things so. Men can escape from the trivial daily work, but a woman can't. She just——"

"Got a letter from Karl," Owen interjected hurriedly, before he was drawn alongside Alan in a man-versus-woman argument; "he's going to mess things up in Washington. Although what he knows about war is a lot less than Alan knows about excitement. You needn't get nervous, Minnie. The nearest Karl'll come to a field of battle will be a discussion with Ruth as to whether or not he looks good in puttees."

"We didn't hear a word from him, or from Ruth——"

"We haven't either," Alan said. "Mother sent Ann a clipping from some Club Bulletin, on feeding; Ann said she knew about it years ago. The article was supposed to be a great discovery."

"Well, Karl expects me to be the family guardian," Owen said quickly. "He and Ruth are pretty busy . . . say, *Mutter*, I'm as full as a goat. I always make a proper pig of myself. Let's go outside and take a look at those new cherry-trees. Cherries seem to be the only thing that do well in San Rafael."

He went up-stairs for a sweater, and Marianna said, while he was gone: "He thinks he knows everything about trees." She said it in a derogative tone, but the implication was that he really did, and she was challenging any one to say that he didn't.

Before Ann and Alan went home, Owen found time to say again, "Tough, Alan."

Alan choked.

"It's all right," he said. "It's all right."

CHAPTER IV

I

IN the middle of the war-years Ann was interrupted in what Red-Cross work she could do by the arrival of Alan the Second. Little Alan, she called him, having a decided and positive aversion for "Junior." Caring for the new baby was not as entrancing, as absorbing, as it had been looking after Dickie; it was repetition—the same hours, the same climbing out of bed at night, the same formulæ: he was not neglected, nor was he pampered. Ann was still scrupulously fair to the two children and to Alan. She had no sympathy with the stories that came ceaselessly to her, and was outspoken about it to Alan. "She always runs a bluff about being sick, or headachy, when her husband's home," she said to him, speaking of a complaining friend; "what does she expect? *Now* she thinks it's terrible that somebody said they saw him in a café with some chicken. Of course she says it's all his fault——"

"You're awfully good to me, Ann."

"I just try to be sensible. You know that horrid little doggerel you told me—'If the queen don't, somebody else will!'—well, that's just it."

Alan nodded.

"I suppose we—you and I—are different from most people, Ann. We knew each other. This love-at-first-sight business is the bunk. It isn't love. And generally it doesn't last very long."

Sagely: "Of course not. There's nothing back of it." Smiling: "We get along because we've got some sense, Alan, about . . ."

2

What they fought about neither Ann nor Alan clearly knew, nor could they have told just how and when it began. Dinner, and an especially delicious one, had been cooked, served and eaten; Alan was deep in a mystery story, Ann curled on the davenport with a *Good Housekeeping*. Lazily, she said, "Major Van Fleet talked to the Improvement Club to-day. About the coming Armistice Day"—it was 1919 now—"and the part we are going to have in the program. They're going to get a speaker from San Francisco. And have a parade. Can't you see it? First the marshal, wondering if his horse will shy when the band plays! then the boys from the academy—*didn't* you know Fred Van Fleet? I used to play tennis with him?—and the veterans, and then the Red Cross——"

"You going to march, Ann?"

"Oh, I suppose so. Of course it'll be silly——"

Alan grunted.

"We can ride down"—a Buick was a part of the household now—"and you can show Little Alan and Dickie the soldier-boys—they're wild about soldiers, Alan!—and their Mommie marching——"

Alan summoned a sickly grin. He wouldn't be offended and idiotic about the thing he was touchy about:

"Ann Meissing wears the pants
While papa takes the kids to see her dance,"

he said, trying to make a free and grandiloquent gesture in accompaniment.

"That wasn't very nice, Alan," placidly.

Something inside of him seemed to strain to bursting point. He said calmly, "I suppose it wasn't, honey. Only some day the boys'll say, 'Papa darned the socks that walked through German armies!'" He dropped his book, stood up and said, for the first time since they had been married: "God, but it's commonplace, Ann! Breakfast—work—dinner—bed . . . and what have I seen? What have I ever done . . . God! . . ."

"You're tired, dear. Want me to put a record on?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

At random she selected a record, wound the phonograph and settled back on the davenport. . . .

Alan lighted a cigarette and began to puff jerkily.

God—why didn't she shut th' dam' thing off? Or select a different record? . . . On the road to Mandalay . . . flying fishes . . . dawn like thunder . . . Burmah girl a-sittin' . . . wind is in the palm-trees . . . temple-bells . . . paddles chunkin' . . . Rangoon . . . her petticoat was yaller . . . a-wastin' Christian kisses . . . bloomin' idol mide o' mud! . . . *idol of mud!* . . .

He dropped the cigarette, still burning, into the china-lily bowl. He looked blankly around the com-

fortable warm room a moment, and then burst out: "Mud! Idol made of mud! Married! Hell!"

Come you . . . back to Mandalay . . .

"Shut it off!" he cried wildly. "Shut it off! I can't listen to it!" He flung his arms out wildly. "What'll I do, all my life? Work, and eat, and sleep . . . eat, eat, eat . . . look at what my granddad did before he was married! Look at what my own dad did, and saw . . . look at Uncle Owen . . . and then take a good look at me!" Her very sanity and coolness riled him, inflamed. "You think you got me cooped up! You haven't, Ann Meissing! Inside of me I want to go—go! Don't you think I'm as much a pioneer as granddad and my father were? Don't you think I want to do just as they did? Don't you think I'd like to fight a hundred Japanese as Uncle Owen did? They think I'm a nice, solid married man . . . and I'm not! I won't be! I want to go . . ."

"We could take a trip, Alan: Honolulu, China . . . the babies are big enough to leave with mama, and we could find a capable nurse——"

Alan snarled: "Yes. Let's be Cook's tourists. 'See, ladies'n'gent'mm, on the right the pagoda of Oofus, and to the left the flowering ginkum!' Let's go to some comfortable hotel . . . there isn't any place to go, now! Everybody knows everywhere. Some day"—darkly—"I'm going to . . ."

She was beginning to become fired.

"What, Alan?" too sweetly.

"You'll see."

"Do you mean——"

Sullenly: "I don't mean anything."

"You do. Say what you mean."

"Take it any way you want," he snapped.

She looked at him swiftly.

"Who is she, Alan?"

"She? There isn't any one. Hell"—angrily—"isn't one enough?" He reached for her hand. "I didn't mean that, honey."

She put her hand behind her.

"You must mean something," she said.

"Oh, I'm just sick . . . of everything . . . a man——"

"And how about me? Do you think I *like* to see that Dickie washes his hands without slobbering every towel in the bathroom? Do you think that the decision of roast-beef over a leg of lamb is a very wonderful one for a woman who has a profession to be making? Do you?"

He was by no means cool.

"What'd you get married for, then?"

"Heaven knows!"

"I suppose," he said with heavy sarcasm, "that what you are trying to tell me is that you prefer discussing fool parades with a big fool like Van Fleet to caring for your house and family."

"That is idiotic, Alan."

"Say, you ever been sweet on this Van Fleet fellow?" Alan had hurt her.

She picked up the magazine and began to hum softly.

"Were you?" he insisted.

She changed the hum to a tuneless whistling.

"Answer me!"

She looked up, and then down at the magazine quickly. "I thought I had," she said lightly.

"Then I tell you this," he labored, "this parade business is all off. I don't stand on the side-lines holding the kids' hands while you and an old flame march in front of me. You bet I don't. I may be crazy, but I ain't no fool! It's off."

"Oh, no it isn't," she broke off whistling long enough to say.

"I say it is! Damn it, Ann——"

"You oughtn't to swear so. Even the children—why, yesterday Dickie said——"

"If you don't like the way I talk go listen to Van Fleet!"

She dropped her magazine, deciding that this discussion would get nowhere. She'd go down-town to the second show, and Alan would be properly apologetic when she returned.

"All right," she said, smiling at him. "I will."

He strode over to her.

"You—stay—right—here!" he said heavily. "Right here, where you belong!"

For answer she went into the bedroom, and took down a coat from the hanger in the closet.

He followed her into the bedroom.

"I . . . didn't mean . . . what I said, honey."

"Didn't you? Don't call me honey!"

"Don't be angry, Ann."

"I'm not angry . . . take your hands off me!"

"Then please stay home. I'm sorry I was so swinish."

She picked up a brush, smoothed her hair, and started to put on the coat.

Alan grabbed at it. "Don't put it on," he said. "Please don't, Ann."

Her eyes blazed with his touch.

"Leave me alone," she commanded. "You can't say things like you did and get away with them. You've implied for a long time that you wished you had gone to the Orient instead of getting married. I've never said anything, but I've been as sick of everything as you have. Now, leave go of my coat."

Instead, he pulled coat and woman to him. She resisted with all her strength, and this resistance, instead of chilling, frightening him, sent a hot shock to his brain. The known, the understood, became suddenly very strange and alluring; he was filled with the hot desire to overwhelm this taut-muscled woman fighting against him. He strained her to him violently, and whispered, "I love you, Ann!"

"Let me go! I hate you, Alan! Let me go!"

He forced her head up, and, despite her attempts to evade him, kissed her squarely, a kiss that unnerved him, made him tremble with strong new emotion. Suddenly, but with no limpness of the body he held so roughly, he tasted salt. . . .

"Oh, little Ann, little Ann . . . I've hurt you. . . ."

Hot tears of his own scalded his eyes: he was mentally, physically exhausted, and very much ashamed.

"Ann . . . I didn't mean . . ."

She was brave enough, although she, also, was trembling, to direct her eyes at him.

"*Why* did you do that?" she asked huskily.

"Something . . . snapped, I guess. I wanted to *make* you love me, Ann."

She looked at him in silence, and he began to fear that she would not even reproach him, but would simply put her tumbled hair straight, and go as she had said; instead, she put her fingers tentatively against her lips. They seemed, before, numb and bruised, but to her touch warm and very alive.

"You love me, don't you?" she said.

He nodded.

"Love me always," rapidly; "always, Alan. *Any* way. I . . . it frightened me, your roughness. I"—smiling at him, and holding out her arms—"I liked it, dear."

Alan kissed her again, but very gently. He wondered if she, too, had that sense of something different and very new, of an untapped force which had always been kept away from the light. The thought of the great affection that was Ann's and his welled up; how many men had, in the same woman, both sweetheart and wife? He helped her off with her coat, and, as she rearranged her hair, stood watching her. Her fingers' deftness was not sufficient to make it orderly again, and she picked up a brush, smoothing the hair about her temples; the task complete, she turned to Alan and away from the mirror, laughing.

"Most men would say, 'For heaven's sake get a move on.' They'd . . . but, then, you aren't most men!"

"You have lovely hair, Ann."

She touched his arm.

"It's dear of you to say it. Want to play some cribbage until bedtime?"

His eyes caressed her. "All right." Then, casually, "Let's not stay up too late. Got a pretty busy day to-morrow."

3

The visits of Alan's mother and father to San Francisco were hectic affairs. Ruth seemed to have none of the Orient's lassitude, or, rather, to have taken into herself Karl's early restlessness; she was tremendously keen for continuous activity—breakfast-on-the-run, golf, shopping . . . bridge, dinner, more bridge—anything, everything, actually entered into with a sort of fervent zest, and actually enjoyed. Whatever she did—or whatever she was doing, for she was never still—was done as if it might never happen again, and every drop of happiness must be wrung from it. She always left Ann breathless, and the two boys laden with toys they did not need and clothes they would seldom wear.

"Why doesn't she get them some koveralls?" Ann wailed. "Where will we ever go that the boys need coats like *that*?"

To Ann, Ruth said, "My dear, I think you have put on a pound or two—it won't do. If Alan is as critical as his father, I'd say you had better Turkish bath or exercise or diet——"

The extra pounds worried Ann.

"How can I?" she asked. "Turkish baths? When? Exercise—mother, I'm at it from seven to seven with

the babies! On my feet every minute. I suppose I ought to eat less, but Alan likes a good breakfast, and if I only have coffee he makes a face; at lunch I've got to cook for the boys, and they insist that I eat with them, and the same things that they do. And at night Alan wants dinner . . ."

"You spoil them, Ann."

"I want to spoil them!"

Ruth examined her swiftly.

"You look tired, Ann. There never was a man yet who thought a woman worked when he was at the office. There probably never will be. When he comes home, and says, 'What you do to-day?' and you tell him 'Oh, just puttering around,' he believes it; he wants you to be a sort of entertainer until he's ready to go to sleep. The Meissings—Karl and Owen, both—get to the place, every so often, where they don't know what they want. Alan's the same, I suppose. Let them want anything, Ann, except—what *you* can give them!"

Ann dimpled.

"*All* of them, mother?"

Ruth was serious, and refused to smile.

"Alan, of course. And, Ann, if you can find the nice point, the place where it isn't 'too easy' and still makes him think you love him, so that he won't become morose—that's even better."

Ann thought a moment.

"I'm afraid that I couldn't do that. I'm all Alan's, and he knows it."

Ruth threw up her hands. "If that's the way it is," she said, "there isn't any use . . . can you imagine

Grandmother Meissing talking like *this* to me? when I was a new wife! And yet——”

“I don’t have to worry about Alan. He . . . he’s different, mother. Oh, I know how some of the men do now: first they begin by teasing their wives about some ‘dizzy blonde,’ and when the satisfied secure wife just smiles about it—as I did, perhaps—the first thing she knows they are paying rent for her apartment . . . I don’t know how to explain, but Alan’s different. . . . He *is!*”—vehemently.

“Of course he is, Ann.” It came to Ruth that, despite the knowledge of men that the East gave her, that he was. All she added was, “Don’t let him get stodgy, Ann. Karl knows Alan’s boss—they were old friends in Japan—and he says that Alan hasn’t much interest in what he does; acts as if all the office was for was a place to spend seven hours—oh, he does his work excellently; Karl’d like to see Alan start an office of his own . . .”

“Alan’s talked about it——”

Ruth shrugged the subject away.

“Sometimes I wish that Karl and I might have a home here——”

“We’d love that, mother!”

“But it wouldn’t do. As soon as we were settled, Karl’d want to be on the move again. Actually, Ann, he is never so happy as when talking about what happened *years* ago! Things that happened then still thrill him.”

“If Alan . . . he says he wishes that *he* had——”

“If he had, Ann, he’d not be satisfied with San

Rafael. Look at his grandfather: his life was exciting—so was Karl's. And Owen's."

"Uncle Owen is what the girls call 'pretty tame' now, though. Although the way he is to grandma is the sweetest ever——"

"He acts like he had a guilty conscience! Ann, I wouldn't trust an old bachelor——"

Ann bridled. "He's a peach!" she declared. "Alan thinks that Uncle Owen——"

"Alan always did," Ruth said half bitterly.

That the uncle had been more to her husband than his own father Ann did not remind Ruth. Quietly, she said, "You know, mother, even if people don't give us very much credit, a nurse understands something about the way men are made. If Aunt Minnie sees Uncle Owen with a new tie, or a bit of flower in his button-hole, the first thing she thinks is that some wild woman gave it to him. But just as long as he is dear to his own mother, *I* don't care *who* gave it to him! Mother, there's an awful difference between having something overwhelm you, and giving it . . . oh, I suppose you could call it its proper place . . . that's a funny way for a wife to talk, isn't it?"

Ruth fastened her wrap about her.

"You'd better not say anything like it to Aunt Minnie," she said. "As far as the flower-in-the-buttonhole goes, Owen might take it out before he comes over here."

"I'd hate him if he did," Ann assured her.

"Girls always stand up for a bachelor!"

"That's because they've missed a lot, isn't it, mother?"

"Possibly. But—to hear any of them talk—you wouldn't think it."

"Uncle Owen doesn't ever——"

"Ann, child, those who *don't* talk are the worst." She stood up. "I've got to go back to grandma's. 'Member, Ann. Take off a few pounds if you can."

4

Ann could not shake off the depression Alan's mother had submerged her in. She felt that Ruth had never been perfectly fair to Alan; that the older woman had always played the excellent wife, but the indifferent mother. For the first time Ann herself "babied" the two boys, and lavished them with affection until the elder whimpered: "Mommie, *why* you don't let us play?" then, with a laugh close to tears, she went into the kitchen and studied the Boston cookery-book in an effort to discover a new cake that required something less than four eggs. She had, she told herself, steered a middle ground between Alan and the children, and she would continue to do so. The rôles of wife and mother were one and the same; they hinged upon the same love: she could not love Alan without loving his children, nor the boys without loving him. It was all the same! Almost one personality, her love. That which she had, as a girl, looked down upon was, now, her whole life: in it she was bound up, her own self eliminated. She wasn't Ann Middleton any more. She had, it seemed, always been married, and it was the same with Alan.

Was it? She wondered.

Could it be? Alan, for most of the day, was gone; he saw—he *must* see—new people, must encounter new things. . . .

What she thought next, Alan, home on the five-fifteen, could not even vaguely imagine.

She had kissed him peckingly, as if the act were necessary and nothing more than routine, and then hurried back into the kitchen.

Alan addressed himself promptly to the children.

"You young roughnecks been bad boys to-day?"

Dickie hastened to say that he had been a good boy, and little Alan chewed his hand with every expression of complete satisfaction in his conduct.

Dinner was very quiet, and Alan eyed his wife furtively.

"Got a headache, honey?" he asked.

"No."

"This is a grand steak. I'm full up to the neck——"

"Up to the neck," Dickie announced over his bread-and-milk. "Up to neck too."

Alan grinned at him.

Fulfilling the agreement to pay no attention to the boy when he echoed a parental expression better unsaid, he went on, "But I've got room for dessert, Ann." To Dickie: "Want to look in my ear and see how much more I can eat?"

This rite complete, he asked, "What you got, Ann? Something good?"

The cake had done that mysterious thing known as cooking unevenly, and had fallen in the middle.

"Mother was up," Ann said. "She says I'm fat,

and that I eat too much. There isn't any dessert to-night."

"Fat? Say, if she had your figure, honey, she'd——"

"Yes, and if I had her figure when I'm her age, I'd do more than that! I've gained——"

"When you're her age, you'll be the cutest——"

"The fattest, you mean! A—little—fat——"

"Oh, snap out of it, Ann."

She snapped, but not out of it, "I won't! You can't order me around—get down from your chair, Dickie, and go into your room and play—the way you do a girl in your office. If you did it to her—if you said 'Snap out of it,' she'd leave you . . . but . . . I can't. . . ."

His eyes opened wide.

"Say, what's the matter?" Aggrievedly, "What'd I do, anyhow?"

"You didn't do anything! You never do anything! You don't have to! You go off in the morning, and then come home at night and say, 'What is there for dessert?' I haven't time for dessert . . . I haven't time to go anywhere, or see anybody . . . even Stitt doesn't come over except about once a month, and——"

"I guess we can afford a girl——"

"You can't get a good one. And I wouldn't have one around, anyhow. I know *you* think *you're* abused, because you've not gone chasing around the country——"

"Now, Ann, I've never said——"

"Of course you did! And——"

Diplomatically, "Well, that's all over. You oughtn't to drag up——"

"It isn't over. It won't ever be. You'll always be thinking, 'I've got to come home, and I'd rather go with some men and take out some girls——'"

"I don't. I never have."

"And instead I've got to go home to a big—fat—slob! And pretty soon——"

Alan went over to her across the table. He put an arm about her, saying jocosely, "Well, it's an awfully sweet big fat slob, anyhow——"

"I won't be fat! Look at the girls in training with me—they look just the same——"

"Yes, but every time they're over here, they tell you how hard it is to get cases, and the way the doctors won't call a girl who doesn't——"

"Do you mean that *I'd* do that way?"

"We weren't talking about you, honey. I just said——"

"Never mind what you just said!"

"Well, you aren't going to nurse, so——"

"Who said I wasn't?"

Alan did not make the mistake he had once before. "You didn't say you were, anyhow."

Something of complacence entered his attitude, and Ann broke into a storm at it.

"I say it now, then," she whipped out. "I'm sick and tired of doing the very best I know how, and having some one tell me——"

"Ho! That's nothing." Alan attempted to oil the waves. "Your mother told me that I ought to——"

"Leave my mother out of it. This is——"

"Well, you were talking about mine, and so——"

"It's very different. *My* mother never told me I

was getting to look like a pig, and *my* mother never went tearing around and forgot that she had a son——”

“Did she?”

“Hush! You want me to take care of the babies, and act like a kept woman the minute you’re in the house——”

Alan grinned. “A kept woman wouldn’t be quarreling with her papa,” he suggested. “Forget it, Ann. Let’s put the babes to bed, and then you be my own girl again.”

“Put them to bed yourself! I’m tired. I’m tired out. I’m *sick* of staying in the house . . . I’m going to bed myself. . . .”

Soberly: “All right.”

Religiously, Alan read until ten o’clock. When he crawled into bed he did it with exaggerated quiet, although he knew instinctively that Ann was very awake. After a few minutes he put his hand over on her shoulder.

“Ann!” he said.

“Leave me alone! I told you I was tired! Leave me alone. . . .”

He grunted.

“All right,” he said again.

It sounded grim to Ann. She wanted to turn to him, and tell him that she had been horrid, and had meant nothing of what she had said, that sheer ennui had driven her to where she lay, but stifled the desire, and composed herself stiffly to sleep. She made sure that Alan was breathing deeply, evenly, before she slipped a repentant hand into his lax one.

CHAPTER V

I

THERE had never been such an autumn as that of 1922; clear up to the week preceding the New Year the rain had held off. The early mornings were nipped by frost, but the middle of each day was warm, almost hot; the blossoming-peach and japonica were beguiled into budding, and even showing faint pink or carmine. . . .

Owen had insisted that Grandmother Meissing leave the San Rafael home and, together with Minnie, take a furnished apartment each winter—an idea which met with the complete approval of Dickie and little Alan, who would stand entranced at the window and announce, in some uncanny way, the manufacture of every machine which passed, while both grandmother and great-aunt (the “babies,” now becoming already slightly long-legged and awkward boys, called Grandmother Meissing ‘other grandma’ by way of delineation) discussed with Ann every recent happening affecting the children: how, for example, little Alan had imitated his father by thumbing his nose—as Alan Senior had done, when repassing a machine that had crowded him into the ditch alongside the State Highway—and had promptly been spanked for it, despite his wails that daddy had done it. . . .

This autumn, or—according to time—winter, Grand-

mother Meissing had refused to leave San Rafael until the first of December. She loved her garden; she discussed every plant that went into it, every snip of the pruning shears in the hands of the Italian who trimmed the grape-vines, with Owen. Grandma was not so young; she tired rapidly; sometimes, Aunt Minnie said, she would even hang on to the railing when she came back into the house: Owen (Minnie said) did not understand this, being a man. Grandma ought to live in a hotel, but grandma, approached on the subject, refused flatly. Over her refusal Owen would not go. Mama should have what she wanted, and he did not attempt (as only he could) to sway her.

Thus, for the first time in years, Marianna celebrated her birthday in the San Rafael house. Several weeks before the event, she became visibly excited and perturbed; Minnie's interpretation was that mama was intending to remain in San Rafael all winter, in the big unheatable house; at last the news came flatly out. The family were to come for the eightieth-birthday dinner, and, what was more, Marianna proposed cooking most of it herself. Would not the children be there? It would not be a real treat for them unless she cooked it—anything else they could get as well in a restaurant. Suppose there were others. That meant nothing more than roasting an extra chicken or two——

"And picking and cleaning them," Minnie wailed. "You do too much, mama. You won't let any one help you. Why don't you let them fix the chickens at the market?"

"This time . . . I let them pick the chickens at the

market," Marianna conceded readily. She had already marked several giant Plymouth Rocks a neighbor had raised, and, by this subterfuge, was positive she would get her own way. Ten years ago—five years, even—she would have gone blithely ahead, remonstrances or no, but now she had recourse to double-turned meanings and, if confronted with them later, would merely laugh, or say she didn't remember saying anything at all.

Owen was let into the plan; when Marianna asked him to bring over a few bottles of wine, he roared, "Shame on you, *Mutter!* Why don't you get a bootlegger of your own? Want me to get pinched?"

Over her spectacles, she told him, "I think maybe you know more about bootleggers than me, *nicht wahr?*"

"You been keeping tabs on me," Owen declared.

"Maybe you need it," Marianna retorted, smiling.

To Minnie was given the most difficult preliminary task: to invite every member of the family, and see that each promised to come. Marianna insisted that the list be complete, and not governed by social position nor money nor anything else. Minnie saw obstacles. How, she asked, would she seat people who had nothing in common——

"For one meal," Marianna said, "they can all sit around my table without biting each other."

There were the former Wittelshofen people, whom Marianna had brought to California years before; Teresa, Jennette, Frederica, collectively called The Cousins—who tipped the scales in this form at over five hundred, and would, Owen declared, bring a fine

price on the hoof. Visiting them was Andrew Meissing, Ludwig's son, and his family of three daughters and a son; there were two Meissing nephews, their wives, their children; several cousins-by-marriage; second-cousins and their families . . . the list was, as Marianna had demanded, absolutely complete, even to one of the nephew's father-in-law. Karl, Owen, Ruth, Minnie, Alan and Ann and the boys.

The morning of this great day Minnie spent between setting the two tables standing end-to-end and the garden, from which she gleaned every available bright bloom. At ten Owen came over from the city, with a six-foot-long box of reddish bronze chrysanthemums and a bag containing the requested wine and little delicacies unpurchasable in San Rafael. For once he did not put on his khaki trousers and old brown shoes, but, in shirt-sleeves, his coat conveniently hung in the hall, cut down great bunches of sweetwater and malaga grapes from the arbor, together with the dark leaves veined with crimson and yellow, and tied them with pieces of string to the chandeliers over the tables. Along with this labor, he directed Alan's efforts to stick alternate red and green candles into a barrel-hoop covered with red crêpe paper, sliced bread and counted rolls, tasted the soup for saltiness, and, as the guests arrived, examined every present, commenting frankly.

"I'm the ring-master of this circus," he told Karl, when his brother and Ruth came.

"Clown, you mean," Karl laughed.

"For that, take off your coat and go out in the kitchen and get busy," Owen snorted. "You got to earn your meal."

Marianna, under an old blue apron, was already dressed in her softest black silk, in the ruffles of which she wore a jet-and-pearl pin; the two brothers insisted that they could finish all that was left unfinished, and bundled her, protesting, out of the kitchen.

Her cheeks flushed with pleasure like a girl's as she greeted the guests.

Talk, talk, talk. What train'd you take over, Estelle? Was the baby good? Where's that husband of yours, anyhow—in the kitchen, eating? . . . he's always hungry; that's a Meissing failing . . . did you see what Ruth and Karl brought? Isn't it a beauty? . . . did grandma like it? . . . I see Mr. Burgess coming up the walk . . . getting younger every minute, grandma . . . *ja!* . . . I didn't want to wear anything except a suit, but you know how some of the girls dress . . . bobbed her hair, and I can't say I'm crazy about it . . . me, either. . . .

Grandma doesn't look a day over sixty . . . who's lookin' after th' babies? Marian? . . . yeah, she's good with them . . . where'd Owen go? wanted to ask him . . . if it isn't your exact size, grandma, you just take it back . . . somebody ought to give Minnie a hand in the kitchen . . . say, Cousins, whyn't you diet . . . I'd rather be happy than have my girlish figure, thank you . . . no, we don't dare go before the four forty-five, although I promised. . . .

On it all Marianna beamed.

She was, she knew, very happy, and at once very proud. It was for her that they were all here, the guests in the living-room and on the porch, the children in the garden, Karl helping Alan ladle the soup, Owen

arranging the marvelously-colored pickles he had brought with him and (Marianna was certain) finding time to oversee critically Minnie's and Ruth's last touches to the table, Ann's lighting of the eighty candles. She was glad with a fierce unknown joy that she had insisted upon this gathering, although she knew no reason why. With difficulty she tried to figure it all out, but soon gave over, and returned to watching the faces about her. *Ja*; it was good to have them here. Next year she must do the same.

Owen and Karl, with trays of cocktails . . . where'd you get it? . . . what's in it? . . . go easy, you know what old-fashioned cocktails always do to me . . . well, because it's grandma's birthday, but ordinarily. . . .

Dinner at last.

Ann's hand found Alan's under the table as the toasts were offered, under Owen's direction; they were begun by Karl, and, after him, given by every diner. Every day you get younger, grandma—here's to the next birthday party . . . to the day you dance at my baby daughter's wedding . . . to the youngest of us all . . . to the head of the family, Grandmother Meising. . . .

The more distant relatives were the most effusive; one or two of them became rhetorical and, at any other time, Owen would have barked at them. His own turn came last. He had been standing; now, glass still in hand, he sat down abruptly, stood up again, strangely moved and ill at ease. He looked swiftly about the table, but saw nothing there to bring him words. Earlier, he had thought of a mighty witty

thing to say . . . how did it begin? He couldn't remember.

At that instant, for no reason at all, he blurted out the last of all speeches he intended, one free of his usual raillery:

"To the best grandma in the world," he said harshly, as defiantly as if he were throwing down a gauge.

Ann looked at the little figure at the head of the long table, behind the great cake with its blazing candles, and the old lady smiled back, indomitably: Ann squeezed Alan's hand hard. . . .

2

There had never been such an autumn. Business was, Alan said, extremely rotten, and he found time to take an occasional day off, days that Ann, he and the two boys spent in searching out spots off the lines of travel in which to loaf, to broil chops or a steak, make coffee, over a little fire. Glorious days, with pungent pine and redwood all about them, and the hush preceding the rainy season dominating everything: on the last of these, the thirtieth of December, Ann said:

"I'll bet our party'll be awfully quiet, Alan."

He sucked on his pipe.

"We should worry. If they don't like it, and us, they can stay away."

She knew that this nonchalance was feigned: they had talked of the New Year's party for days, and both were keen that it be perfectly as it should be. Ann thought now that it was always that way: ahead of time they planned, figured; this to eat, that to drink,

bridge for Nora and Sandy and Mr. and Mrs. Smythe, pinochle for Blanche and Webster Hayes and Alan, the phonograph set going at eleven . . . oranges, at least four dozen, and made into juice, some more of that gin from Santa Rosa. . . .

Planning was the nicest part. It took her away from everything, from the clamor of the boys, their fighting and crying, Alan's thumb-sucking at night (she *had* to keep a bandage on him!), away, almost, from Alan. . . .

Alan seemed to feel the same about it. Into the smallest details he entered with tremendous vigor, as if he would take from the commonplace every drop of enjoyment, and waste bottled energy on that which needed but little.

In one sense the torpor of marriage had settled upon them none at all. In a second it had, and with deadliness: each day, each week, seemed exactly the same as every other: the same work, the same breakfasts and dinners and grubby hands on the boys, the same friends, the same discussions, bickerings, open and wild disagreements—yet both Ann and Alan were stirred constantly by they knew not what. An urge to get away, hastily stifled if in cool mood lest the other see, flaring forth often at the finish of a quarrel, quarrels seemingly more closely spaced; regular, almost, in their timing as a minute-gun's booming, notwithstanding. So much of daily life, and then a blazing forth. . . . Alan, once, had slapped Ann, lacking other argument; they had fought, after that, over the suit-case she began to fill . . . tears, contrition . . . and back to monotony again.

The Smythes came first, New Year's Eve. . . .

Before long cards were forgotten, but not until the gin-and-orange juice had been drunk several times.

Webster Hayes told of a rodeo he had seen during the year; told of it, and gave demonstration. Mounted on a chair, holding to the back and straddling the seat, he whooped up and down the room. . . . What had, apparently, impressed him most was that a competing cowboy, named Jerry Stall, had tamed an unbroken cowpony called Wood Alcohol.

"Jerry Stall on Wood Alcohol!" he roared, banging his chair across the living-room.

"Ride him, cowboy!" Sandy Jenkins urged. . . .

Up and down the room. "Ride him, cowboy . . . ride him . . ."

Hayes began to tell the story over again.

"It was like this. The cowboy's name was Jerry Stall, and the name of the horse——"

"What horse?" Alan asked very soberly.

"Jerry Stall's horse," as soberly as Alan. "The name of the horse was Wood Alcohol. Well, Jerry Stall he got into the saddle——"

Alan: "Who did this, Webster?"

Instructingly, "Jerry Stall. He got into the saddle, and Wood Alcohol gave a jerk, and then he——"

"Who?"

"Jerry Stall! He pulled off his hat and went 'Whoopee!' and then he——"

"Who was this you're talking about now?"

Ann giggled.

"Jerry Stall! He yelled, and the horse began to sunfish, and so he just stuck his spurs——"

"Whose spurs?"

"Jerry Stall's! He stuck his spurs in, and the nag began to whirl around and around, until we thought that the cowboy——"

Alan asked steadily: "You didn't say anything about a cowboy before, Webster. What was the cowboy's name?"

"Jerry Stall! The horse kind of jumped, and then lay down, and Jerry Stall fell off, and he grabbed his tail——"

Softly: "Whose tail?"

"Jerry Stall's tail!"

That ended the yarn. Webster tried, once, to begin the story again, but, with tears in her eyes, Ann shouted, "Oh, Webster, you're a terrible story-teller," and he subsided.

The phonograph did its duty valiantly. Nora Jenkins called to her husband, once, "Why don't you hold *me* like that when you dance?" and Sandy called back—"What for?" . . . Ann caught Alan's eye as he came in with a tray of drinks, and winked at him as he grinned. . . .

Twelve o'clock. A wonder, Ann whispered, that the babies didn't wake up.

Happy New Year! Happy New Year! Ann and Alan kissed furtively, mindful that husband and wife should not show affection; Alan, his arm merely touching Ann's, guided her to the dark porch. Once out of the hot smoke-whirling room he had her in his arms. Ann's first thought was that her husband's lips were unpleasantly bitter with orange-juice, then, as he held her fiercely, she seemed to relax suddenly, to give in not to

the man who held her, but to hot queer exhilaration: she boasted, as did Alan, that liquor didn't bother her—she just had a good time, that was all—but now she was almost unknowing of who kissed her, and only that she wanted whoever it was not to stop. She wrenched herself back to life.

"Don't, Alan!" she said.

"It's all right," they heard Sandy Jenkins snicker. "I won't ever tell on you two."

Alan, back in the living-room, did not believe that Jenkins would, for Nora Jenkins was still inside, trying to spear a cherry with a mah-jong counter; Alan wondered half grimly what girl was missing. . . .

3

The boys awoke on the first day of January within a minute of the time they were always ready to get up: ten minutes to seven. A heavy-eyed Ann managed to get through breakfast, to slice the oranges and boil the eggs and make the toast. At ten she called Alan.

"We've got to eat at grandma's," she reminded him. "You've got time for a bath—and for goodness' sake, shave!—and then we'll catch the quarter to twelve to the city. I feel more like going back to bed——"

Alan yawned, and sat up.

"You should have called me when the kids came to life," he chided. "Oh, lord, but I feel like a wreck! Say, wasn't Webster a scream? I don't want any breakfast: wait till I get out of the tub and then we'll finish up the dishes. Some mess, I'll bet."

"They're done. I did them while"—she tried to keep

her voice level and not show her incipient anger—"while you were sleeping. I didn't mind . . . come on, Alan, get out of bed."

While he splashed in the tub, and even began to whistle faintly, she forced herself to straighten the living-room. Who, she wondered, had put cigarette stubs in the china-lily bowl? The room made her dizzy. It stank. And, in another year, it would be just the same . . . she'd be cleaning up, and Alan would be in the tub . . . and Dick and little Alan would be complaining . . . and over and over and over . . .

She flung the windows open.

The incoming cool, fragrant air seemed to lift her from the despond; the curtains suddenly became bright and yellow again, instead of ill-hung cotton rags, a bit of sun illumined the nodding china-lilies and made the white petals rays of light about the golden chalices in the center. She went to a window and watched early-morning purple of the deep valley become familiar in tone . . . ordinary . . . blinked: told herself that it *was* New Year's, and that she was a little silly to feel so; called gaily to the boys that they were going over to great-grandmother's, called to Alan that it was a glorious day outside . . .

She kept up her high spirits over to the city, at the family dinner, and home again, talked incessantly, laughed at nothing at all, had Alan go down to the restaurant on the boat, and bring back a paper bag of stale bread from the table, which she and the boys threw out to the sea-gulls. Putting the tired children to bed she made play of, having one race against the other to see who would "beat."

"Ann, you're a wonder," Alan said, when they were alone. "Even grandma says she doesn't see how you do so much. You're a great girl."

She smiled at him drowsily.

"Get my slippers, Alan, like a nice boy," She paused, and then said, smiling again, "I'm *dead*."

"I'll bet you are, honey."

He knelt and drew off her shoes after unlacing them, took them into the bedroom, and placed the slippers he brought back on her feet tenderly.

"You're an old sweetheart," Ann mumbled, half asleep. "An old sweetheart . . ." and closed her eyes, curling up in the chair.

Alan watched her stumble off to sleep. He was, he told himself, very happy, and terribly lucky. Take Sandy Jenkins, now: Sandy knew darn well that Nora wasn't averse to a bit of a good time, not too particular with whom she took it. Excitement . . . that was all they wanted now. He didn't exactly believe what people said about the kids—the seventeen-year-olds—it sounded to him like bunk, and he guessed that it was. But from what he'd seen, the married ones weren't any too well married. He thought, with increasing force, that it was good to be where he was, with Ann breathing steadily, softly, curled in her chair, with the boys in bed. He lighted a cigarette, and, fearful that the fumes might waken her, stepped outside.

He stood quietly, smoking, leaning against the side of the house.

The moon was high enough to glint through the laurel, and, to the east, he could see its reflection, like a track of phosphorescence of some great invisible boat,

on the black water of the bay; there was no wind, and even the dry leaves of the row of eucalyptus did not move or rustle. The stars were very white, and seemed, of their own weight, to hover closely to the earth.

From somewhere to the north Alan heard a faint thrumming, that increased steadily, almost imperceptibly; he strained his eyes to catch, against the darkness, the mail-plane: was unsuccessful, and yet could hear it approach, roar overhead . . . diminish in sound . . . to nothing.

He wondered why it was the night had changed. The moon—lovely? Hell, by two in the morning it would shine squarely into the bedroom and wake him. Ann—why the devil didn't she go to bed, instead of . . . of snoring, yes, snoring, probably, by now, in a chair. Ann—why did she yell at the kids so? Do this. Do that. You make me sick. Can't you ever leave your mother alone a *minute*? She was too picky. Yes, sir, she was too picky. She picked at him, too.

His eyes were somber when he came inside and noisily locked the door.

Locked in! What was that old thing they used to sing when he was in college? "Put on your slippers, you're in for the night." That was him. In for the night. For every night of his life. His eyes did not change as he watched Ann's gentle breathing. He knew, he told himself, every possible mood, every gesture; he knew what she would say before she said it, what she would do before her own mind was made up.

He wanted to get out . . . get out, and with the

same thought was certain that he never would, and that the bond which held him to Ann was too strong for his breaking. He was unfair; he believed, at that minute, that he wanted to break it, and lacked the strength to do it.

Still noisily, he prepared for bed, leaving the bedroom door open that Ann, hearing, might awake; he wanted to go anywhere save between the sheets. Anywhere? Where would that be? Where wouldn't it be the same? Where could a man go that was new? It wasn't right. His granddad—bang, a shoe—and his dad and Uncle Owen—bang, the mate—they had a chance—

"Did—I—fall asleep, Alan?" Ann mumbled.

He did not answer.

"You aren't—angry, dear?"

"No!"

"Then come and tell Ann so!"

He tried to stand very erect and stern but, in bathrobe and slippers, could not achieve the expression he desired.

"Come put your head down," Ann commanded.

"There . . . tired, dear?"

He choked.

"Oh, Ann . . ."

She ran her hand through his hair.

"I used to think, Alan, when you were—blue, that it was because you were sorry you were—married. That you couldn't . . . I get that way too, when I see girls who were in training with me—foot-loose—but I can't *stay* that way. It's a kind of . . . oh, itch

in us, I guess. We think too much about ourselves. People used to *do*: now they think instead. Don't be blue, sweetheart . . . please, for Ann."

She thought, for a fleeting instant, that when he raised his face for her kiss he had been crying.

CHAPTER VI

I

THE middle of February Alan came home early—earlier than usual, almost at three.

He sprang his news from the front door:

"I haven't got any job, Ann."

"You haven't got any—*Stand* still, Dick! you know you've got to have on other clothes when you come home from school!—What *did* you say, Alan?"

"Old Richardson fired me. Or I fired myself. It all happened too quickly to know what was what."

"Why, he *couldn't* do that! Haven't you got an interest in it, that dad and Uncle Owen——"

"Not now I haven't. You see——"

"Dickie! Run outside. And take your cap— There, he's gone at last. Now, Alan, what did happen?"

"Oh, there was a trivial affair I was handling for the firm. Richardson made a few suggestions: they didn't seem very good, but I said 'All right'; then he yelled that I was the worse yes-man he'd ever seen, that there wasn't enough incentive in me to stiffen a dime, that I didn't give a damn about the business.

"I told him I didn't.

"Of course he bellowed that I ought to be ashamed of myself, and that the only thing I was doing was killing time until dad died. He added a few other

things, too; indolent, selfish, useless and helpless were some. He forgot to call me a parasite, but that was the only thing he omitted.

"I thought I ought to square myself. 'I'm not wild about what I'm doing,' I said. 'Possibly you think the world won't get along if you don't knock off a profit by selling it imitation lacquer, or shipping dried-shrimps to China. The difference is that I'm honest about it, and you're not. If I could get out—or if I could have, twenty years ago—and gone after the stuff into funny old villages, I'd have got a kick out of it. Twenty years ago,' I said, 'men worked for the love of it, because they could do it in strange places, but now, when a man says he likes his work and his office, and the brass spittoon in the corner, he's a liar or a fool. He does it because he has to.'

"He sprang a good bit—probably some of it's true—about purpose of effort. Said that any man whose sole effort was to get pleasure was, considering what kind of a world we live in, a pretty poor sort of a cuss.

"I told him that he was right about part of it, that considering the kind of world we lived in a man who didn't try to get some fun out of what he could was an ass. Then he said that it took brains to get money—oh, he was sore about *something*—and that he knew, because he made it (I shouldn't have laughed at that, Ann!) but that any fool could inherit it, just as any fool could accept it. I asked him if he'd ever given me anything that I hadn't earned, and he said he guessed I'd given him his money's worth, and that what he was objecting to was the *way* I did things,

and not that I didn't do them. Look at the way your grandfather did; he told me. Look at the way your own father did—he used to go down to the docks at five in the morning, like all the other produce men, and fight for the right kind of merchandise, and *like* it! I reminded him that dad liked it so much that he pulled out from under the first chance he had, and the old blow-hard said it was because there was a chance for dad to make his pile. 'You think that was it?' I asked. 'I know it was!' he said, and I let him think it. Dad never said anything about it, but even he couldn't fool grandma—she knew, and she told me. 'In the blood,' she said.

"We kept talking, and I suppose both of us lost our tempers. I said something about his wanting me to raise the flag every time we cornered a shipment of heavy silk and giving three rousing cheers when we got an additional two per cent. off an invoice.

"He sang a long song about the romance in business. Maybe there is, but it always seems to be in the other fellow's business, and not your own; we were both getting warm, and going out of our way to make cracks at the other fellow. I guess I started it—I said something about the Advertising Club (remember I told you he was made a member of their board of directors a week ago?); that it was typical of business now—let some crook try to sell phony oil stock and they jump with both feet, but *they* haven't nerve enough to be real crooks; they just lied, I said, in little ways—oh, two-hundred-dollar suits reduced to seventy-five, and every kind of motor-oil the best, when any one knew there was only one *best*, or that they were

all the same—things like that, that you read in the ads every day . . .

“He told me, when we were going pretty good, that the trouble with me was that I had the wrong perspective, that I didn’t look at things right. I asked him what he meant, and then we had a few fireworks. He said . . . I stuck around home too much. I asked him what that had to do with it.” Alan began to speak loudly, and to gesticulate. “He said—the dirty pup! —he said, ‘You’re all in in the daytime, Meissing.’ I couldn’t seem to get the words out to tell him what I thought, so . . .”

Ann asked, in a hushed voice, “What, Alan?”

“Well,” grinning wryly, “he was as big as I am, and only ten years or so older.”

For an instant Ann glowed white-hot in complete self-renunciation: had she done a work of destruction, and, in her yearning over Alan made of him a man unfit to cope with what must remain without their joint castle? Had she, in her love, smothered him? She tried to imagine herself in Richardson’s place, in other men’s places, in considering Alan Meissing as a man. Notwithstanding everything, ennui, boredom, quarrels, eagerness for change, her love for Alan had—except in moments of passionate anger—never faltered nor dimmed. If she might not, and a man like Mr. Richardson would not believe her capable, might not build Alan up to a man’s standard, at least she could stop tearing him down.

“Alan . . . I can go out . . . and nurse——” she began unsteadily.

He misunderstood.

"What for? Hell, I'll open an office of my own, simply to show that old nincompoop that he's as crazy in the head as he's foul in the mouth. The question of incentive doesn't enter into it. It never has. It never will. My life isn't bound up in invoices. It isn't lived from eight to five, but the other way round. The old ass said that the world was constantly changing, but all he does is talk about it. It isn't all clear to me, either, what the change is, but some day I'll understand it, and then it'll be easy."

"But, Alan, dear——"

"Did you get the bus filled with gas to-day? The paper says it goes up to eighteen cents to-morrow. I forgot to tell you, too, that I went up and saw Uncle Owen before I came home. Told him what happened—that is, as much as necessary."

"And he said——?"

"Oh, nothing much. Told me to go ahead."

What Owen Meissing had said was that there would be, for his nephew, more happiness in Ann's tiniest finger than in owning ten godowns filled with prewar-priced silk. He warned Alan, also: "I wouldn't say anything to your grandmother about it, if I were you. She worries about little things that never used to bother her before. I've got to bawl her out all the time for fretting . . ."

2

There was a little flurry of excitement while Alan rented an office on Montgomery Street, and had a glass partition built for his stenographer, while Ann

selected two rugs and brought over a bowl for flowers to go on his desk: Owen and Karl ladled out huge doses of advice, warning him to "take it easy" until he got into the swing of things. He found enough business to satisfy him. Happen? Nothing ever happened, he told Ann. The only difference was that his name was on the door. Nothing happened worth talking about.

3

There settled, in closer intervals, a pall of apathy about them. Ann was, Alan thought, becoming increasingly hard to get along with; she was cross, nervous, irritable, with him, with the children, with herself and what she did: she was critical, too critical. She expected him to listen with attention to the prices of coats for Dick, and how terrible it was: didn't he make enough to *buy* coats, without being troubled with them? *He* didn't stew around about how they raised his office rent from fifty to sixty-five—that is, all he did was mention it. He didn't say, "Now, at the White House they wanted twenty-five, and at O'Connor's twenty-three, and Roos Brothers had lovely sailor coats but Dick outgrows a double-breasted coat so fast—Jaegers' had those tan coats, but they wanted too much for them—what do you think I ought to do?" Think she ought to do? He didn't care what she did!

Oh, he would mumble, get any one that's good material.

Had he, she wanted to know, absolutely no interest in the children's welfare?

And so on and on, until that insidious up-cropping: "Mr. Richardson was certainly right!" Ann would say . . . and then, Alan thought bitterly, they were "at it again."

"At it"—clear to the place where Alan would bellow, "For God's sake, don't yell so loud. That dam' busybody next door never misses a word when we scrap! Shut up! Shut up!"

Neither man nor woman, hotheaded as they were, became sulky after: the dissension was forgotten, never mentioned, until the next disagreement.

A regular charted routine seemed to be followed, and adhered to as if the chart hung above Alan's desk and Ann's kitchen sink. A period of happiness, of picture-shows, company, of little marks of affection—the stroking of a hand, a kiss on Ann's burnished hair in the evening: were there, they wondered, any married people as satisfied, as happy? And then calm—almost a terrible calm; dogged reading of books, dogged attempts at trivial conversation, heavy nods of agreement . . . and then an eruption. About something. Or about nothing.

As this—Alan, with heavy sarcasm: "Don't you like it?"

And Ann: "No. I *don't* like it!"

"What you get married for, then?"

"Heaven knows, I don't."

"If you aren't satisfied, why don't you get out?"

Hotly, Ann: "I will. I'm sick and tired of it all. Everything. You. The children. Everything!"

"Well, what you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to—get—out."

"I suppose you think you're going back to nursing? Say, you couldn't get a case if you paid your patient—not if *I* were asked for a recommendation."

"Think not?"

"I know not!"

"Is *that* so?"

"Well," scathingly, "you know what Stitt said about doctors. Of course, if you'd be *that* way, I suppose you'd get a case once in a while."

"If I had to, of course I'd be that way!"

Silence, and then Alan would say, "Now you're talking through your hat, and you know it."

"I'm not! I mean it!" Standing up: "And I'm going to do it, too! I will not stay in this house another instant. Then you can do like all the other married men. Get some seventeen-year-old blonde——"

"Don't be so silly, Ann."

"And see if she'll be willing to become a—great—big—fat—old woman like I am . . ."

Here the argument would take diverse courses: Alan would either say that she wasn't what she said, after which Ann might relent or drive him off and, slamming the bedroom door, go to bed, or, Alan would say that if she were what she said, it was because she didn't have a good day's work to do, and the fire would blaze up anew.

Had one been weak, the other strong, had they not come of the same hardy stocks, one would have given in, the other dominated. This was impossible. Because of Ann's tremendous loyalty, she never, even in the heat of battle, mentioned a word of what tran-

spired, not even to her own mother. The urge to speak of her trouble was strongest, and hardest to resist, when she was with Grandmother Meissing. There was about the old lady a complete atmosphere of peace, and peace brought only by a lifetime of fierce endeavor—a family reared, troubles calmly surmounted, all beads of a bright string which, in her moments of retrospection, she might click and count and—now—smile over.

And, after the whirlwind, both would be unduly kind, considerate; there would be swift, promising embraces, as fierce, as sweet, as uncloying, as any of their courtship days . . . and calm . . . and flaming up in anger again. . . .

4

Spring. Rain, soft and warm, or cold, penetrating, driving, with a northwest wind from the ocean hissing in the eucalyptus and snarling in the white-oaks; then broad patches of blue sky, and bluer iris on the sun-mottled hills, mission-bells under the madrones, buttercup in every meadow. Grandmother Meissing and Aunt Minnie opened the San Rafael house again, seeds were bought, late bulbs planted.

"It is good to be back—home," Grandmother Meissing said to Ann. "In the city, in an apartment, I can not breathe. If I had my way, I would never leave my own bed. But"—smiling—"the children would never hear of it. And Owen—he must have his own way! Sometimes, Ann, your Alan must be the same?"

Ann smiled back at her.

"Sometimes," she said.

"It is better to give them their way," Marianna said very slowly. "It is better. Although, *liebe* Ann, I did not always think so. *Ja!* It takes all kinds of people to make a world. And it is easy for an old woman to talk, *nicht wahr?*"

Ann wondered how much she knew, how much she guessed. Had Alan, ever, said anything?

"Grandma," she began, but Marianna cut her off.

"Come see what Owen did when he pruned the roses," she said. "He cut them like they were trees! If we have any flowers it will be a miracle. That Owen"—she smiled, almost as if challenging Ann to agree with her—"he must do it his way."

"Men like their own ways, don't they, grandma?"

The old lady nodded.

"*Ja!* And now, when they have so much more time to be home, they must have their own way with their wives! Owen, even, asks me how much I paid for a roast, Sunday. '*Ja!*' I told him, 'you should tell me about meat! I have cooked before you could eat.' But he tells me, anyhow. *Hörst du*, Ann, a man must order somebody! Alan—you. Owen—me. *So geht es.*"

Loyally: "Alan doesn't——"

With the forgetfulness of age, the thing that frightened Owen, Marianna said, "If you go down-town, Ann, bring me home some yellow turnips. Owen likes them. Minnie doesn't, but she can eat something else. When I was a girl, Ann, my old mother used to tell us—the children—that she only cooked for two. For those who liked it, and those

who did not. She used to . . . *was hab' ich gesagt?*"

"About——"

"I forget sometimes, Ann. *Was hab' ich . . . ach*"—a partial remembrance—"those poor people in Germany, Ann. Those poor people! Not enough to eat, and no clothes to wear—all because of that *verdammte* Kaiser! Alan's grandpa, long years ago, left Germany because . . . *ja!* . . . yellow turnips, two bunches, not too big turnips, Ann"—fumbling in her apron pocket for her purse.

"Yellow turnips, grandma. Anything else?"

"No. Nothing else. Maybe . . ." sadly—"maybe you ask Aunt Minnie. I think there was . . . something . . . I do not remember."

"Bread? Butter? Coffee?"

"I think there is enough . . . ask Minnie, Ann. I can not remember as I used to. We get no younger, little Ann. *Ja!* and no wiser . . . comes Alan home early to-night, Ann? There is a rat in the basement, and he has eaten off the tops of the jelly-glasses . . . yellow turnips, Ann. Ask Alan to come after supper and set the trap for me, if he has time."

CHAPTER VII

I

IT was a wonderful night—a spring night of enormous silence, of white, steady stars, of gold-dusted air, a sky like a purple dome encrusted with jeweled lights, but none of the Meissings knew this. Through the open window of the dining-room, around the table of which all save Owen sat, floated the odor of white lilacs and the acrid sweetness of the blossoming almond. Only one of the electric lights was lit, and that was shaded by folded newspaper so that it gave a sickly yellow-gray light; under it Owen's face, as he lay at full length on the couch in the corner, showed in new deep-set lines. Not for many years—more than he cared to remember or be reminded of—had Owen Meissing been so near the great black Reality; never had he been forced to wait, impotent, useless, hands tied, while Death grimly picked at the lock with skeleton fingers; wait, lighting a cigarette, another, another, as he had done all of this day, this night, and, now, the coming morning.

All of the Meissings were around the old-fashioned square walnut table that had come from the California Street house, save Owen on the couch, and Grandmother Meissing—Marianna. Not one admitted it, even in their husky whispers, but every one

knew that, up-stairs in her room, Grandmother Meissing was dying.

One morning she had not come down-stairs. At eight Minnie went into her room and found her furtively lifting the hem of the sheet with a fumbling hand and wiping her eyes.

"Mama! Mama!" Minnie cried, to be told gruffly that it was nothing—probably something she had eaten—to leave her alone, let her rest, she was tired. She would get up later.

The doctor told flustered Ann: "You're a nurse, Mrs. Meissing. You know what you're up against in old people. They just go to bed and don't get up. There isn't anything definite yet. I'll tell you when there is. Then—we'll see."

He looked at Ann keenly.

"You've been crying," he said. "That won't do. You've got to keep your wits, and keep the rest of the family up to the mark. I'm sending a nurse up. I'll be in later again. Keep your wits—don't forget that *you* are a nurse also."

2

For the next few days Marianna gained, and lost, and gained again. At the end of the fifth day she said weakly, "I won't stay in bed." She shook as she said it, and the day-nurse humored her with something about asking Mr. Owen what he thought about it.

"They won't let me—get up, Owen," she whimpered to him. "Bed is a—place to—die in——"

Owen, frightened chalk-white, roared at her, "I

never heard you talk so foolishly in your life! I'll go get the paper and read to you, *Mutter.*"

As he read she dozed again, silent for the most part, now mumbling or moaning slightly; Owen thought that she seemed like a tower falling and crumbling in upon itself. He sat, horribly sick, watching her quick shallow breathing. As he struggled to realize what was happening on the bed beside him, it came to him that there was something of himself, too, that must be dying: a bond between mother and child which endures as long as they, but no longer, something independent of love, of hate, of years. His inarticulateness disappeared. "Mother, mother," he whispered. "Don't leave me all alone!" The veil was rent, and behind it was a holy of holies, an inviolable relation. . . .

It was almost dawn. Outside, the wind, which had begun to blow with the lightening of the skies, was roaring around the house; it rumbled in the chimneys, and a sudden gust tore at a loose shingle, and sent it back, banging, against its mates.

In the house everything was still. Owen still lay, eyes closed, wide awake, on the couch. The window over the front door was an arch of glimmering gray barred by the lines of the pergola without. Downstairs the chilled, cold Meissings listened intently; no sound, except the muttering indifference of the wind about the house. Now and then they spoke in whispers, Karl to Owen or Ruth, Alan to Aunt Minnie or Ann, but for the most part they were silent, listening for anything.

Alan, as he sat, shivered; the day before the nurse had, when he and Ann had gone up-stairs, asked him to speak to his grandmother.

"Grandma! *Grossmutter!*" he had whispered loudly.

"She moved her eyes," the nurse said.

Now, down-stairs, in that room suffocating with cigarette smoke and repressed tears, Alan thought, "She moved her eyes! I wonder if she knows what is happening?"

Ann snapped to consciousness.

"Come, Alan," she whispered. "I'll make some coffee . . ."

He whispered huskily to Ann:

"I wonder if she knows!"

Ann blinked back tears, and said, very low, "No, Alan."

"Will the nurse——"

"She'll tell us—before——"

Owen sugared the proffered coffee carefully, permitted Ann to pour in cream, stirred the cup, then setting it on a chair beside the couch, lighted another cigarette.

"Go—and see," he asked Ann.

The Meissings heard Ann's footsteps, heard two little thumps as, in the upper hall, she slipped out of her pumps; whispers . . . Ann's descending footsteps.

She was crying when she came into the dining-room.

"You'd better . . . go . . . up-stairs," she said, choking.

3

Ruth patted Karl's hand ceaselessly, Minnie had begun to cry, awful deep gulps of sobs wracking her; Owen stood up, walked to the window and looked out at the almond-blossoms. Dead? For a moment, even now, even after seeing the candle-flame up-stairs gently blown out, the thought had no meaning. Then, abruptly, the old elemental meaning struck him like a blow: like a knife; that meaning before he had known the acquired meanings which grief and faith have put into the word: his mother "was not." It was impossible, incredible.

"I'm going . . . to the city," he said, in a very thin even voice. "I'm . . . going to the city."

"Can I get you at the hotel—if I want you?" Karl asked.

Owen nodded.

He said, in the same voice as before, "Where the hell else have I got to go? Karl . . . she just went to sleep, didn't she? Didn't she, Ann? You are a nurse. You know. Didn't she?"

"She just went to sleep," Ann repeated.

The Meissings stood watching one another.

Ann felt she could stand it no longer. "Aunt Minnie—come home with us—with me. I've kept the boys home to-day. Uncle Owen, Alan'll stay—you and mother and father go to the city. Or to Hotel Rafael here. Take a hot bath. And try to sleep a while. Or you'll be sick. Promise." She tried, jerkily, with difficulty, to make her voice utterly impersonal, that of a nurse on duty. "Aunt Minnie is

coming with me. Don't cry, please, Aunt Minnie. or the boys will wonder——"

Owen cleared his throat.

He felt that anything he ever said must be choked out now, and that it would be unutterable later.

"Mother was very happy here," he said awkwardly. "Don't cry, Minnie. I'll be over again . . . to-night. Don't, sis. We can't keep what we love, always. Some of us"—the chanting of Shinto priests, black-robed, the repercussion of the temple bells, the wild beating of the gongs, all burned in his ears—"some of us never . . . some of us haven't even . . ." he stopped, and then began again: "Mother had a lovely life. And Karl and I were a handful. But it has always been easy for her, because she knew that, no matter what happened"—passing his arm clumsily about his sister—"we Meissings, we stand together."

Up-stairs, they heard the ominous footsteps of the nurse, setting the sickroom to rights.

Karl blinked, and Owen set his teeth together with an audible click, as if summoning up all his reserve.

"Come——" Ann commanded. "None of us can do anything. Alan'll wait——"

When they were walking slowly down the gravel path, bordered by mignonette spaced mathematically by a hand that should never dig in the warm ground again, Ann said rapidly, "There's something I forgot to tell Alan. I've got to see him a minute——" and rushed up the walk to the house.

"Alan, Alan," she breathed, while he patted her head; "suppose . . . oh, Alan, suppose it had been . . . Alan, Alan, never leave me!"

"I couldn't," he said simply.

Ann found his hand.

"I couldn't either," she told him; "I couldn't either. No matter what happened. What you did, or what I did. Or whose fault. What has happened . . . will happen again. But it can't matter. For it's *us* it happens to."

"It's us," Alan repeated. As Ann stepped away, he added soberly, "I'd make Aunt Minnie stay around the children, Ann. Read to them, or something. Then she won't . . ."

THE END

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